

**THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY: CULTIVATING
A MINISTRY OF CARE AND COMPASSION**

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ABSTRACT

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United Theological Seminary, 1996

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This document addresses the problem of the "crisis of separation" that existed within the membership of the Mount Olive Baptist Church of Macon, Georgia. To combat this problem a three-phase plan was implemented with an aim at establishing greater communal spirit and cultivating ministers of care and compassion among the membership. The methodologies used were: the establishment of a support group; the preaching of a series of sermons; and the development and delivery of a workshop to the entire congregation. This project resulted in the congregation's appreciation for communal relations and the realization of the call by God to care for and about other persons.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose and aim of this project is to address the problem of disunity and the lack of care and compassion among the members of a local African American congregation. The disunity and lack of fellowship is termed by this writer as a "crisis of separation." This separation crisis is manifested in the lack of communal spirit among the membership. The separation inhibits the members from ministering to, or caring for persons who may be suffering.

It will be this writer's task, first, to show how this crisis of separation is not merely a congregational problem, but a social crisis for the African American people. Second, this writer will provide the theological framework for ending this separation crisis and developing a ministry of care and compassion. Third, this writer will demonstrate a model of ministry that may be replicated in other churches or groups that also feel the pains of separation crisis. This model of ministry will be presented in three phases.

This writer's purpose in developing a three phase plan

to combat this crisis of separation is to emphasize and reemphasize to the congregation the need for the members of the church to be in community with one another. Each phase is geared to develop a communal spirit among the members, helping each member to realize his or her call to be ministers of care and compassion.

Phase One will entail the development of a support group that will help to heal the wounds and hurts of those who may be suffering in any way.

Phase Two will be the presentation of a sermon series that will focus on the theological and ethical concepts of community, care, and compassion.

Phase Three will consist of a workshop that will be presented to the congregation, again with the emphasis on community and the call by God for each person to become a minister of care and compassion.

The following chapters of this work will elaborate on the specific crises that exist and how this writer came to realize the need for such a ministry. There will also be provided in this work a discussion about the context this

ministry was developed in, along with the theological basis for doing such a ministry. Next this writer will provide the practical model that was implemented in the context with the results of its effectiveness.

The goal of this ministry is to transform the actions and attitudes of the congregation so that each member knows the power of being in community with one another and so that each person realizes his and her call to be ministers of care and compassion. Again, this ministry is implemented to develop the congregation into a ministering community that affirms, edifies, and supports all persons so as to bring about social transformation.

CHAPTER ONE

A CRISIS OF SEPARATION

From the time the pilgrims landed on North American soil, until the present, people of color living in America have been faced with racial, economic, political, and now even environmental crises. The dominant white majority has been, and is still responsible for many atrocities against persons of color in the United States of America. These atrocities range from the nearly total annihilation of the native Americans, forced slavery of persons of African descent, the exploitation of Mexicans and South Americans on plantations, and the storage and placement of dangerous chemicals and industries in minority communities. There has never been a time in American history that people of color have not been faced with some type of social crisis, some type of social problem that threatened the present and future of minority people in America.

The indirect effect of the racial oppression of the dominant white majority is manifested in the broken

relationships that exist among people of color. There exists within the African American community a "crisis of separation" that threatens the unity and future of the people. The term "crisis of separation" is used by this writer to explain the broken fellowship, community and communal spirit, and the overall lack of concern many African American people have for one another. The effects of this crisis of separation is evident in Black on Black crime, single parent families, lack of care and compassion for persons who are hurting, disrespect for the elderly by the young, and a host of other social problems that are destroying the communities of the African American people.

As a response to the social crisis that existed and still exists in the communities of people of color, the African American religious movement has sought, through various means and methods, to bring an end to this crisis of separation. Yet, because of this crisis of separation that has even infiltrated the church, there are many African American churches today that have lost the spirit of community and concern for the downtrodden. Many churches today, rather than meeting the spiritual, emotional, and social needs of those who may be suffering, have now become

maintenance oriented and program centered. By maintenance oriented this writer means that the primary goal of some African American churches today is to raise the budget for the purpose of either meeting operational expenses, or building large cathedrals or centers so that those who are part of the "inner circle" may gather to maintain the status quo. In these maintenance oriented churches there is little or no mention of social transformation; little or no ministry that impacts the lives of those who are socially destitute and downtrodden; little call for change in the actions and attitudes of oppressive social structures. In this age when persons are suffering from many problems, no church can afford to be only maintenance oriented. Every church must, once again, work to recapture the spirit of community and advocacy, and struggle to meet the needs of those who are suffering.

As this writer's contextual analysis will indicate, the Mount Olive Baptist Church has been predominantly a maintenance oriented church. The majority of the membership are middle income persons who live away from the community where they worship, yet 45% of the persons who live in the community are legally below the poverty level. Thus, the

congregation comes into the community to worship and leaves the cares and problems of the community with the people who live there. The congregation never truly experiences the pain of persons who live where the church members worship. These people struggle, living with poverty, the feeling of powerlessness, and discrimination.

For many who live in the community, there is an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness and helplessness. There are at least five persons in the apartment complex near the church who are living with the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) virus. Two of them tell stories of rejection from their families and acquaintances. Thus, they are forced to live and struggle with their illness alone and in secret. For these persons who suffer with social diseases, the church should be the place where support and compassion are offered. Yet, the reality is that, in many cases, such as with the Mount Olive Baptist Church, the church is the very place where these persons are forced to hide their condition.

There are two individuals who are members of Mount Olive living with the AIDS virus. Both persons fear that if members of the church knew of their condition, they would be alienated and made to feel ashamed of their condition.

Other persons in the church are suffering with emotional, domestic, psychological, and social problems as well, but feel as though the church is not the place where they will receive support and compassion in their struggles.

The members of Mount Olive all worship together, yet, there is little fellowship that takes place among the membership. Persons who do fellowship with other members do so because they are either related or because they are members of the same church group. The membership as a whole never takes the opportunity to minister to each other through sharing personal stories of suffering and consolation. There is very little sense of community or communal spirit among the members with one another, or with those outside of the membership.

Given the present situation of the Mount Olive Baptist Church, the mission and ministry that will be the focus of this doctoral project will be twofold: first, it shall be a ministry that works to open the hearts and minds of the congregation so that it becomes a caring and compassionate community that affirms one another as persons. This ministry will seek to recapture the advocacy spirit in which each member realizes the call to minister, so that persons who are oppressed and downtrodden will have a voice, and

persons who suffer with life's disappointments will receive assistance, encouragement, and empowerment from the church. Secondly, it shall be a ministry that will foster a greater sense of community and communal spirit among its members. This ministry will educate persons concerning the biblical understanding of community, so as to transform individuals, the church, and in turn, the community and the society.

The methodology by which this writer will seek to develop the congregation into a ministering community will be presented in three phases. I Phase One there will be the establishment of a support group in the Mount Olive Baptist Church that will minister to the needs of those who may not feel comfortable going before the entire congregation with their problems. This support group will act as a liaison between the congregation and the individual to minister to whatever need(s) the person is faced with. The support group will also provide workshops and seminars for the congregation, educating persons on how to minister to various needs of people. Phase Two will consist of a series of sermons that will seek to stress and empower the congregation to realize the necessity of living in community to bring about social change and minister to persons who are hurting. Phase Three will consist of a workshop presented to the entire congregation emphasizing the need for the

congregation to see themselves as community, and stressing the importance of each member accepting his or her responsibility to be ministers of care and compassion.

This type of ministry is needed in the city of Macon, and around the country. Some African American people have forgotten what it is like to be held down and held back. It is this writer's hope that preaching and teaching concerning advocacy, communal spirit, compassion, and empowerment will spread throughout the city so that church members may be brought closer together, and persons who suffer with social diseases, poverty, and oppression will once again feel that the church is fulfilling its mission to be a "voice crying out in the wilderness," bringing the good news to the poor, healing the broken hearten, setting the captives free, recovering sight to the blind, and setting at liberty them that are bruised.¹

¹Luke 4:18 (Paraphrase).

CHAPTER TWO

GOD'S TRANSFORMING SPIRIT²

Part of what motivates the development of this ministry that seeks to create a greater sense of community and a care giving fellowship is derived from my own struggles with suffering and pain. Therefore, this segment of this work is presented as a means of catharsis in that it helps to remind me of God's salvation power and grace in my life, and it has helped me to deal with some very painful life experiences. It also has taught me the need to share my story as a means of ministering to others who may be going through similar struggles.

THE STRUGGLE WITHOUT AND WITHIN

My life has been faced with many challenges, and the salvation of God has been revealed to me in many different

²Preston Robert Washington, God's Transforming Spirit: Black Church Renewal, (Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1988), .

The phrase "God's Transforming Spirit" correctly identifies God's action in the life of this writer; therefore the phrase is used as the title of the second chapter.

ways. I have come to know God to be a protector. There have been occasions when the Lord has arranged it so that I either arrived after or left a place right before a shooting or stabbing occurred. I know it was God who protected me, as grandmother would say, "from dangers seen and unseen." I have come to know God as a help in times of trouble, for there have been times when I needed support and it seemed as if only God was there to aid me in my time of need. I have come to know God as the preserver of my life. I know that it was and is God who has kept and is keeping me. Yet, more recently, I have come to know God in a much greater way than I ever imagined. I have come to learn that it is out of struggle and pain that God really reveals God's divine presence, and develops the spiritual and personal make-up of the individual. It is out of this struggle and pain that I am learning who I am as a person, and who I am in Christ.

I was "Called" to pastor the Mount Olive Baptist Church on the fourth Sunday in September, 1992. I accepted the call and was to begin as pastor the first Sunday in December of that same year. Things seemed to be working in our favor. My wife, who worked for Sprint long distance service in Nashville, Tennessee, was able to transfer to the Atlanta office with no problem. She began working in Atlanta in November while I prepared to move from Tennessee. On the

day that my wife and I were to move into our apartment in Macon, Georgia, my wife was working in Atlanta and I was busy moving in. I received a phone call from a supervisor on my wife's job calling for me to come to Atlanta right away because my wife had fallen and passed out, and they had rushed her to the emergency room.

We later found out that my wife was suffering from shingles in her legs. After being off work for six months on disability and suffering from serious pain, my wife was able to return to work. She worked for three months and again became very sick. She lost a lot of weight and suffered from extreme exhaustion. Doctors ran tests and performed many exams, but the cause of her weight loss and physical problems was not determined. Again, she returned to work only to become very sick; thus she had to go back on temporary disability. More tests were run and many different physicians were seen for a prognosis. Finally, she was seen by a hematologist who ran a series of blood tests. His first set of tests showed only that she suffered from very low red and white blood cell counts. Finally, he suggested, just to rule out the possibility, that she undergo tests for Hepatitis and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). To our surprise the test for AIDS came back positive. At the time, my wife's T-cell count was

sixteen. (The normal count is nine hundred or more. Anything under two hundred for someone who is HIV positive is considered as having "Full Blown AIDS.)

When my wife was diagnosed with AIDS, we went through many emotional and personal changes. I have been tested at present nine times, and each time the test came back negative. Yet, both our lives were disrupted and changed forever due to her illness.

I have gone through many personal battles with God and myself asking such questions as "Why?" "Why me?" "Why this?" "Why now?" Our intimacy, our desire to have children of our own, and our future dreams and aspirations were severely altered if not totally shattered. Bitterness and anger were a part of my daily life. Being pastor of a church and having a great concern for God's people, especially oppressed people who need their spirits and their minds encouraged, made my spiritual battle greater.

I have always believed that the church should be the place where persons who are hurting and/or struggling with life's problems and temptations can come and share their concerns with the people of God and find support and compassion in their circumstances. The church is made up of

a large number of people who are broken, living broken lives, and struggling in their brokenness. Therefore, the church should be a refuge for persons who are suffering. Yet, many people fail to see the church as a refuge or a community of support. Many people find that they have to hide their conditions and problems from the church so as not to be ostracized or alienated. Knowledge of these situations caused me great pain as pastor.

As a new pastor to the congregation and dealing with the situation I was faced with at home was a great struggle. It has been difficult hearing members tell me that they can not or do not trust other members of the congregation to pray for or give support to them in their time of need. My understanding of the church as a caring community that ministers to each other, yet hearing members warn against their lack of trust for one another, and seeing first hand how persons in the church prey on one another, has been saddening.

This doctoral project began six months after my wife was diagnosed with AIDS. She left this life, October 17, 1995. The situation of my wife's sickness and the attitude of some church members has shown me what other persons who are suffering might go through by not having anyone to

trust. We had to hide her condition from the people who should have given us the greatest support as ministers of God. God has shown me now, more than ever before, what suffering in silence really is and what it means to have God as a refuge and strength in my life. Yet, I also know now what must be done to transform the church into a caring community where members will minister to each other rather than ostracize and alienate each other.

THE CONCLUSION

In the midst of my struggle, God is making me grow. Though every day is filled with uncertainty and pain, I am understanding a little more who God is, who I am in God, and what God's purpose is in my life.

It is my desire that God will use me and my experiences to minister to others. I know what it is like to suffer in silence. Yet, I also know that God did not intend for it to be that way. The church was established by Jesus to be a ministering community. It is out of my experience in living with a wife with AIDS, and our finding it necessary to keep it from the congregation, that this project gets its motivation. Therefore, it is within the context of the Mount Olive Baptist Church that this ministry of care and

compassion was developed, so that others will find among the membership of Mount Olive a ministering communal spirit.

CHAPTER THREE

SOCIAL CRISIS MINISTRY:

DEFENDING THE MANDATE AND METHODOLOGY

The life, ministry, and teachings of Jesus, with other Old and New Testament scriptures, provide the mandate and methodology for doing social crisis ministry and developing communities of care and compassion. The life and ministry of Jesus was one that called for liberation and justice for the oppressed. Jesus' teachings concerning the Kingdom of God, love for fellow brothers and sisters, empowerment and self-worth of every individual, regardless of economic or social status, permeate Jesus' message to the world. The African American church must become as concerned with and as passionate about liberation, justice, and empowerment as Jesus was. It is the responsibility of every church, particularly every African American church, to work to transform the American social structure so that everyone receives the rights and freedom they are entitled to. This writer agrees with Dr. Forrest Harris that "Black churches that desire to contribute to the development of a new social

order must take seriously the challenge of social ministry: the humanizing of social structures that otherwise keep social victims in an endless cycle of social crisis."³ Social crisis ministry, then, is the church's effort to transform oppressive social orders, educate and empower persons to see their own worth in society, and help persons see themselves as part of a larger whole. By teaching and sharing the love and message of Jesus which emphasizes freedom, justice, and the worth of every individual, persons and structures are transformed, and the Kingdom of God is manifested on earth "as it is in heaven." This transformation is brought about when each individual is brought into community and partnership with God and humanity.

COMMUNITY AND PARTNERSHIP

A society [community] should not be called a community unless (1) there is extensive participation by its members in the decision by which its life is governed, (2) the society [community] as a whole takes responsibility for the members, (3) this responsibility includes respect for the diverse individuality of its members.⁴

³Forrest E. Harris, Sr., Ministry For Social Crisis: Theology And Praxis In The Black Church Tradition, (Georgia: Mercer University Press 1993), viii.

⁴A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation Of The Trinity, (New York: Paragon House, 1994), 4.

This quote, taken from a book by A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, provides a definition that this writer finds useful in developing community and communal spirit among members of the church. In this work Ogbonnaya uses the African understanding and importance of community in an attempt to present the relationship of the Trinity as a community rather than a hierarchy. Ogbonnaya points out, "an African communal understanding of the Divine provides an adequate ground for: (1) explaining the meaning of equality; and (2) clarifying personal distinction and temporal subordination within community without subjecting differences to ontological inferiority."⁵ To Ogbonnaya, to hold that the relationship of the Trinity, Father (Supreme Parent), Son, and Holy Spirit, as anything other than community, subjugates the Son to the Father, and the Holy Spirit to the Father (Supreme Parent) and the Son. A communal understanding of the trinity maintains that each entity works in partnership with the other(s), both in creation and in bringing about humanity's salvation.

This understanding of the Trinity is helpful to this writer because it reinforces the need for and the call for

⁵Ibid., ix.

humanity to also view itself as community. Being in community requires that: (1) each individual's rights be maintained and respected; (2) the whole community look out for and minister to persons in the community who are in need; and (3) each individual be accepted in full, regardless of differences. Just as each member of the Trinity does not work in the same way, yet, they remain in community, so each individual has varied views, gifts and talents, but community must be maintained. Like the Trinity each member of the community must view himself or herself as a partner, both with God and with the rest of humanity.

Partnership requires that individuals are responsible to and for one another. Partnership with God means that God has given humanity the privilege of participating with God in the care and upkeep of God's creation. Evidence of this participation with God is found in the scripture where God gives humanity dominion over creation (Genesis 2:4ff). God even allows Adam to participate in the naming of the animals, because God wants partnership with humanity. As Stanley Menking points out,

Biblical faith says you are God's partner. To God you aren't a slave whose only duty is to do what you are told. You aren't even an employee who agrees to do work in exchange for pay. You are a real partner whom God invites to share the responsibility for carrying out God's plan for

the world.⁶

Partnership with God means partnership with humanity because all are left with the responsibility to care for all of God's creation. Thus, every individual is, again, responsible for and to other individuals. Thus, Menking points out the importance of individuals seeing themselves in community because ". . .as God's partners, then, we are called to reach out to others. Anything less would deny your partnership. For God wants all persons to be partners."⁷

Thus far, this writer has ventured to discuss in brief the need for humankind to view itself as community and partners with God and other persons. Community and partnership are necessary so that humanity can carry out God's plan for creation, and so that each individual can minister to and assist his or her brother or sister when he or she is in need. Chapter five of this work will give the theological mandate for individuals to live in community and partnership for the purpose of helping and healing. At this

⁶Stanley J. Menking and Barbara Wendland, God's Partners: Lay Christians At Work, (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1993), 2.

⁷Ibid., 8.

point this writer will attempt to show how this ministry plans to build community and cultivate a ministry of care and compassion among church members. *

DEFENDING THE METHODOLOGY

It is this writer's experience that when most persons in the African American community hear the word "minister," they automatically think of a person who has either accepted the "Call" or has the desire to do a specific ministry such as preaching, pastoring, missionary work, or some other "high profile" clergy work. Most persons, if not all, think of the minister as the CLERGY person who has taken on the responsibility to serve others. Yet, we who are Protestants and members of a Protestant church were founded on the belief and premise of the "PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS." Tertullian explains the priesthood of all believers in this way:

. . . Are not we laymen (laypersons) priests also? It is written: 'He hath also made us a kingdom and priest to God and his Father.' The difference between the Order and the people is due to the authority of the church and the consecration of their rank by the reservation of a special bench for the order. . . . For where there are three, there is a church, though they be laymen. Therefore if you have the rights of a priest in your own person when necessity arises, you ought likewise to have the discipline of a priest, where it is necessary to exercise his [or

her] right.⁸

The priesthood of all believers, therefore, is the belief that every Christian has the God given right and responsibility to seek to do the work of the ministry as mandated by Christ and his teachings. Every Christian is to preach and teach the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, be a witness of the actions of God and God's love toward humanity, work to bring in the Kingdom of God on Earth, and minister to the needs of persons who are oppressed, dispossessed, and hurting. These are the responsibilities of every Christian person.

Lynn Rhodes, in her book, Co-Creating: A Feminist View Of Ministry, makes the claim that "While affirming the ministry of the whole church, we are still practicing a ministry that is largely seen as carried out by clergy."⁹ Rhodes' assessment is correct when it is applied to the Mount Olive Baptist Church. Many of the members do not see themselves as ministers or priests, having the responsibility of ministering to the sick, the needy, and the hurting. Rather, they see the ministering "job" as the

⁸Henry Bettenson, ed., Documents Of The Christian Church, 2cd. edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 71.

⁹Lynn N. Rhodes, Co-Creating: A Feminist View Of Ministry, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 15.

responsibility of the pastor or preacher. It is the aim of this project to help the congregation to realize that each member has the responsibility to minister to, and care for, persons who are in need, regardless of their conditions or problems.

Realizing that a change in attitude must occur before all members of the congregation view themselves as ministers, and knowing that this type of change does not occur over night, one of the tasks of this project will be to establish a support group within the church. The support group method is derived from the work and writing of Edward P. Wimberly. Wimberly, in his book, African American Pastoral Care, describes how a support group can be utilized to help the members become care givers. He outlines the benefits of a support group established by a pastor that helped persons who were suffering with the death of a loved one thus:

(1) [The support group] provided opportunities for relatives and friends to identify and empathize with one another; (2) provided opportunities to share in a common story of the faith tradition; (3) provided a ritual and worship context for linking and connecting with a meaningful religious plot which brought renewal and rebirth in the midst of suffering; (4) provided a loving and caring group of lay persons and family who facilitated the expression of feelings of grief and mourning; and (5) encouraged the lay care givers to help the grief sufferers use stories from their own lives as a

means of facilitating the grief process.¹⁰

Although Wimberly notes that this support group was set up to minister to persons who were suffering with bereavement, the same benefits can apply to a support group that is called to minister to any problem with which persons might be faced. These five benefits are also the desired aim of this writer's establishing a support group in the Mount Olive Baptist Church so that persons in the support group will capture the spirit of care and compassion and be able to inspire the entire congregation to do so.

The support group will exist to help and assist persons who are suffering and in need, yet, the larger aim of the support group will be to help the congregation see themselves as "lay ministers." Moreover, the support group will lead the congregation in discovering the "call" to care. Lay ministry is, in essence, the aim of this project. Stanley Menking points out the need for such a ministry in his book Helping Laity Help Others. Menking states that,

The biblical theological consensus about ministry of laity serving others has not completely permeated the consciousness of the laity. Many people feel they lack a call, training and authority. They help others, but this is not viewed as ministry. Some laity

¹⁰Edward P. Wimberly, African American Pastoral Care (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 46.

believe the pastor is paid to do it.¹¹

Menking's assessment is correct. Many people do not realize that God has called all persons to be in "partnership" as ministers. Therefore, it is the task of the pastor to help members see and accept their responsibility to care for others. Menking endorses the use of support groups for this very same reason. In Helping Laity Help Others Menking presents and offers some guidelines and benefits for preparing laity to do ministry. He offers suggestions on how pastors can develop a corporate ministry of the congregation. In the following statement he notes some of the benefits of establishing a support group ministry:

By bringing laypeople together in groups, on any aspect of ministry, you (the pastor) are putting support groups in place so you do not have to be the sole provider of support. The hope is to build a network of support among laity as well as to strengthen those which already exist. What you are doing is taking advantage of one of the greatest assets available for supporting people in laity ministry--using the rituals and relations already in the life of the church: resources of faith that can heal and empower.¹²

Menking is one of many persons who have found it empowering to establish a lay ministry through a support

¹¹Stanley J. Menking, Helping Laity Help Others, (Westminster Press, 1984), 21.

¹²Ibid., 91.

group in the local congregation. Howard W. Stone, in his book, The Caring Church: A Guide For Lay Pastoral Care, tells of the need for establishing a lay ministry and support group. Stone also outlines a model for initiating a ministry of the laity. Stone points out one reason for establishing a support group ministry is because some people will not seek out professional help, be it from counselors or even clergy. There are some times that the only help and assistance some people receive comes from persons who are in similar situations. This writer agrees with Stone when he states,

Pastoral care is the task of the total Christian community-a task of ministering to one another and reaching out beyond ourselves. Daniel Day Williams, in defining the church, put it this way: All the lines of thought we have been exploring led to one conclusion about the church: it is the true Christian community holding out hope for the nurture and health of the spirit of those with in it when it is animated by the spirit of acceptance, of reconciliation, and of service.¹³

Whereas Stone clearly shows the need for establishing a lay ministry support group in the church, this writer does disagree with one suggestion Stone makes for the recruitment of the support group. Stone suggests one way the pastor can find persons to be a part of the support group ministry is

¹³Howard W. Stone, The Caring Church: A Guide For Lay Pastoral Care, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 4.

to "Announce invitation to total congregation."¹⁴ This writer agrees that in the ideal situation where everyone really is concerned about the well-being of others, the invitation method would do fine. Yet, if there really were an ideal situation, there would be no need for a special support group; the entire congregation would already be doing the task of caring for and about one another. Therefore, because congregations are not made up of ideal people, the pastor has to realize that there are some persons who are just not right for this type of ministry. Such factors as, the time one has to commit to the ministry, the spiritual development of the person who is serving, the willingness of the person to help serve others, and the ability of the individual to be confidential, are necessary requirements for serving in a support group ministry. Opening the invitation for anyone to join can be, and may become, a major hindrance to the ministry's effectiveness. This writer suggests that the pastor choose, from among the congregation, persons who have already proven themselves in a positive sense in these areas, and seek to cultivate other persons through those who have been chosen.

¹⁴Ibid., 24.

PROCLAMATION AS MEANS OF CULTIVATING COMMUNITY

Thus far this writer has ventured to outline and define why this ministry is needed and one way of implementing a ministry of care and compassion. Still, there is one other method that has been used by both Jesus and the disciples, as well as in the culture of the African American people, to empower, instruct, and motivate people to action; that method is through preaching.

Dr. Kelly Miller Smith, Sr., defines social crisis preaching as, "God addressing the human condition as it is at present."¹⁵ Smith further defines social crisis preaching as, "proclamation of that which is crucially relevant within the context of the Christian gospel in times of social crisis."¹⁶ In this time when the African American church and people are faced with numerous crises, especially the crisis of separation, it is through the proclamation of the gospel that persons are able to "hear from heaven," for the purpose of instruction, encouragement, and empowerment. Through proclamation the man or woman of God interprets the ancient text of scripture, relating it to the existential circumstances of the people, empowering them to both "keep

¹⁵Kelly Miller Smith, Sr., Social Crisis Preaching, (Macon: Mercer University Press. 1984), 19.

¹⁶Ibid., 86.

the faith" and to work toward the establishment of the Kingdom of God and community.

The impact of preaching in the African American community has proven to bring change. From the slave preacher, who encouraged the slaves to hold their heads up because God would one day bring freedom, to the Civil Rights movement that had its formation in the preaching power of a Georgia preacher (Martin Luther King, Jr), preaching has created social transformation among the African American people and American society. For this reason this writer has chosen to use the preaching of the gospel as a means of creating change within the hearts and minds of the Mount Olive Baptist Church members. There will be three sermons preached to the congregation during regular morning worship that will have as their focus The Church As Community, with the emphasis on Community, Care, And Compassion. The aim of these sermons will be to instruct, encourage, and empower the congregation to see themselves as a ministering community.

The late Dr. Kelly Miller Smith, Sr., a proponent and practitioner of preaching to bring about social change, states the importance of preaching:

It aims at setting corrective measures into

motion. Social crisis preaching is calculated to yield a practical good with regard to the most painful problems of society. It is deeply rooted in the history and meaning of the Christian faith.¹⁷

To Smith, one of the aims of preaching is to bring about change. Change in individuals, structures, and society is all the aim of social crisis preaching. For this writer, preaching and teaching are a necessity for building a community of caring compassionate people. It is in preaching and teaching that the power of God is met with the spirit of humanity to convict, instruct, encourage, and empower persons to be in partnership with God and their brothers and sisters.

CONCLUSION

The call to care and be in partnership with God is made to everyone. Hence, it is not only the "job" or responsibility of the "called" clergy alone to minister to the needs of others. Community and partnership require that each individual look out for the welfare of others. Each person is and has been called to be a minister of care and compassion. Everyone must take and accept this responsibility.

¹⁷Ibid., 33.

It is the goal of this writer to help to build a stronger communal spirit among the members of the congregation and help each person to realize his or her call be a minister of care and compassion. Once again, this writer's first task in this project, was to establish a support group so that persons who are suffering will have an advocate in the church and realize that they don't have to suffer alone. The second goal of this ministry is to create a greater sense of community and communal spirit among the members by presenting a workshop and by preaching specific sermons that will focus on care giving, unity, and community. By initiating and implementing these plans of ministry, this writer believes that lives will be changed, the church will realize its mission to be a ministering community, and the African American community will come to recognize that they have an advocate in the Mount Olive Baptist Church family.

At this point, in order to provide background information about the context in which this ministry is to be implemented, it is necessary to provide a contextual analysis to facilitate understanding the call and necessity for this ministry.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MOUNT OLIVE BAPTIST CHURCH: A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

The subject of this contextual analysis is the Mount Olive Baptist Church of Macon, Georgia, located at 957 Oglethorpe Street in one of the historic residential districts of Macon, three blocks north of downtown Macon.

Information used in this contextual report was acquired from a number of sources, all of which are government boards and agencies whose jobs are to plan, research and make decisions for the context area. Therefore, the information used is considered reasonably fair and accurate since it is based on reports and projections done by these agencies. The specific agencies used were the Macon Economic Development Commission, the Macon Chamber Of Commerce, the Bibb County Board of Education, the United States Census Bureau, The Macon Planning and Zoning Board, and Wilson &

Associates Appraisal Services, and in a few cases, it was necessary to conduct personal interviews to secure historical, eye-witness data.

The methodology used to formulate this analysis will be to examine the context area, moving from the general location, to the specific subject (Mount Olive Baptist Church) itself. Therefore, this report will begin with where the city of Macon is in relation to the state of Georgia. Information will also be provided about the history of Macon. Next, statistical information will be given about Macon and what the city has to offer. Then, the discussion will move from the general city of Macon to the more specific geographic ministry area. Lastly, there will be a report on the specific context of ministry, its history, make-up, and purpose.

MACON AS IT RELATES TO GEORGIA

The city of Macon is located, geographically, near the center of the state of Georgia. The city of Macon encompasses fifty square miles while Bibb county (also considered Macon) contains 277 square miles. According to the 1990 census report, Macon is the fifth largest city in the state of Georgia with Atlanta being the largest.

Macon is easily accessed by two interstate highways, I-75 (North-South) and I-16 (East-West). The two interstates intersect near the downtown central business district. There is also a by-pass, I-475, through the western part of the county which connects with I-75, both North and South. Other major highways include U. S. 80, 41, 22, 129 and eight state roads.¹⁸

Macon is governed by a mayor and fifteen city council members who are elected to four year terms. Three of the At-Large council members represent the entire city with the remainder representing the five wards. Bibb county is governed by a Board of Commissioners elected to a four year term and headed by a full time chairman.

MACON'S HISTORY AND HERITAGE

The area where the city of Macon was founded has had settlements on the land that pre-date the Israelite monarchy. Archaeological excavations at the Ocmulgee River (Macon was built along the Ocmulgee river) indicate that

¹⁸This information was provided by Wilson & Associates Appraisal Services October, 1993. The Mount Olive Baptist Church purchased property directly across the street from the main sanctuary which required an appraisal of the property. A copy of this appraisal was made available to the church.

Native American settlements existed in 8,000 B.C. On a hill near these historic settlements, Fort Hawkins was built in 1806. Fort Hawkins was established for the protection of the settlers as they moved westward across the Southeast. General Andrew Jackson and other military leaders utilized the fort in the nation's early struggles. Following Indian treaties in 1821, Macon was laid out and incorporated in 1823 on the west bank of the river.

Prior to the Civil War, wealthy planters and businessmen built elaborate mansions and cottages in Macon, many of which still stand today. Four of Macon's downtown churches were established during the pre-Civil War period, two of which are African American congregations.

Macon resisted two attacks by the Union troops during the Civil War, but was occupied by the federals in 1865. A confederate depository was located in Macon. Several foundries and munitions plants were also located in Macon.¹⁹

Following the Civil War, Macon and the Middle Georgia area experienced many struggles with racial equality. Prior to the Civil Rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's, many

¹⁹This history was supplied by the Macon Economic Development Commission, section 1, page 1.

of the universities, hotels, parks and other public facilities were either segregated or denied African Americans access all together. Many of the persons who lived during these times remember well the "WHITES ONLY" signs.

The Civil Rights Movement made a huge impact on the Macon and Middle Georgia areas. The city of Macon had its own bus boycott. There were also many sit-in's, marches and protests of various forms to end the racial oppression in the area. For the most part, the Civil Rights movement in this area was led by African American clergy. Two of the clergymen who were involved and who were leaders of the movement are members of the church that is the focus of this contextual analysis. One is the former pastor of this church, the Reverend E. S. Evans, the other is now an associate minister and a former pastor elsewhere in the city, the Reverend Van J. Malone. Both of these men, along with others, stood in the front lines of the marches and protests, and were taken to jail for their protest against inequality.²⁰

²⁰The historical information concerning Macon's struggles with Civil Rights was gained from personal conversations with some of those who participated in the marches and boycotts. Both Reverend E. S. Evans and Reverend Van J. Malone were helpful in providing eye witness accounts.

ABOUT MACON

The 1990 Census Population Profile reports Bibb County as having a population of 149,967. The population of the city of Macon is 106,210. Out of this number 52.2% or 55,645 are African American, 47.1% or 50,265 are Caucasian, and 0.7% make up other minority groups. Population projections indicate that by the year 2000 Bibb County will have a population of 173,400, 48% of which will be African American.²¹

Statistics show that 32% of the residents in Macon are employed in service related jobs, 20% are employed in retail, 17% are employed in manufacturing, 12% are employed in government and public utilities, and 12% are employed in agriculture, construction, wholesale, and mining.²² The top ten companies of employment are Robins Air Force Base, the Medical Center of Central Georgia, Bibb County Board of Education, Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company, Blue Bird Body Company, Mercer University, Government Employees Insurance Company, Cagle's Inc., The Bibb Company and HCA Coliseum Medical Centers (listed in order). These ten

²¹Washington, D.C.: United States Census Bureau, 1990. (Check Appendix, III-V).

²²Georgia: Macon Economic Development Commission (1992) sec. 3-11, (Check Appendix, VI).

companies comprise the majority of Macon's work force.²³ According to the 1990 census, the average income per household in Bibb County is \$32,297 with an average household size being 2.5 persons. The per capita income is \$12,125.²⁴

The Bibb County Board of Education is one of the largest employers in the city of Macon. Macon presently has four high schools, four middle schools, and thirty one elementary schools with a total enrollment of approximately twenty-five thousand students. Fifty-five percent of the graduates from Bibb County schools attend post-secondary institutions. There are also eighteen parochial schools and private academies with a total enrollment of 2,959 students.²⁵

In addition to elementary and secondary educational facilities, Macon has become an educational center for fine colleges and universities. Mercer University, located near the center of town, approximately three blocks from the Mount Olive Baptist Church, offers co-educational programs

²³Ibid., Sec. 4-1.

²⁴Washington: Census Bureau 1990.

²⁵Information was supplied by the Bibb County Board of Education.

of study in the liberal arts, business and economics, engineering, law and medicine. Wesleyan College, noted as the first college in America to grant degrees to women, offers studies in the liberal arts. Macon College, operated by the University System of Georgia, offers co-educational, two-year programs in fifteen fields. Fort Valley State College, eighteen miles south of Macon, offers degrees in the liberal arts through its Macon extension. Crandell Junior College, a privately operated institution, offers business and secretarial courses through two year programs. Macon Technical Institute, operated through the Georgia State Board of Technical and Adult Education, offers diploma programs in business and industry related fields. More than a dozen other colleges are located within one hundred miles of Macon, including Georgia Institute of Technology, University of Georgia, Morehouse College, Clark-Atlanta University, Spelman College, Morris Brown College, The Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC), and Georgia State University. With the presence of these very fine post secondary colleges and universities, Macon is quickly becoming a center for education in the state of Georgia and throughout the southeast.²⁶

²⁶Georgia: Macon Economic Development Commission
(1992), sec.3-6.

Another major source of employment in Macon is in the service area of health care. Health care comprises approximately 18% of the job market in the city of Macon. Bibb County has six hospitals with over five hundred medical doctors, ninety-three dentists, a public health department and ten nursing homes. The Medical Center of Central Georgia is the largest hospital south of Atlanta. The Medical Center primarily serves a 30-40 county region. The Medical Center is the best equipped facility in south Georgia, and its services extend to the Florida line.

In addition to the Medical Center, the Middle Georgia Hospital is located one block north of the Medical Center. The Middle Georgia Hospital is a 160-bed facility . This Hospital is privately owned and operated by the Charter Medical Corporation. The Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) operates a medical complex near the Macon Coliseum in east Macon called the Coliseum Hospital. There is also a hospital located in the northern section of Macon called Charter Northside. These four hospitals provide a total of 1,146 beds and make the area a center for health care for all of south Georgia.²⁷

²⁷Information supplied by Greater Macon Chamber Of Commerce from a telephone interview. According to Commerce employee, this information was taken from a 1993 report.

MINISTRY AREA

The Mount Olive Baptist Church is located in the historical residential district of Macon, Georgia. The historical district is primarily designed to preserve the historic buildings, such as the Mount Olive Baptist Church, one and two family residential properties, and the old antebellum homes.

The residential district is under certain regulations that are intended to protect the area against destruction or encroachment. The city encourages uses of such properties which will lead to the continuance and preservation of the cultural, social, economic, political and architectural heritage of Macon and Bibb county. The Mount Olive Baptist Church is one such property that falls under the restrictions of the Macon Bibb County Historic Preservation Committee.

Mount Olive is located in central Macon, just two blocks north of the central business district. The Planning and Zoning Commission locates Mount Olive in census tract 106. According to the 1990 census report the total population in tract 106 was 3,111; of this number 1,424 are African Americans. There were also 447 families and 1,102

households in tract 106.²⁸

There is a growing trend of single parent households in trac 106. According to the census report there are 246 households headed by single parent females. The census bureau has projected a 15% increase in this number by the year 2000.²⁹ One reason for the large number of single-parent homes in tract 106 is because of the Oglethorpe Homes. Oglethorpe Homes is the oldest government subsidized housing unit in the city of Macon. It is located parallel to the Mount Olive Baptist Church, yet very few of the Oglethorpe Homes' residents are members of Mount Olive.

The Oglethorpe Homes is made up of 188 apartments. One hundred percent of the residents are African American with 92% of the units parented by single women. Five percent of the residents are elderly with low income and 2% are disabled. The average age of the single parent mothers is twenty-two. To qualify for residency into the Oglethorpe Homes one must apply at the Macon Housing Authority and show proof of hardship such as low income, abuse or physical disability. Residents are only required to pay 30% of their

²⁸Georgia: Macon-Bibb County Planning & Zoning Commission (1992), 5.

²⁹Ibid., 7.

gross income. Practically 100% of the residents are receiving assistance from the welfare program.³⁰

Although Oglethorpe Homes is a government subsidized housing unit, there are many positive programs offered. Residents can take advantage of a GED program and receive their high school diploma. Drug abuse and awareness classes are offered on a regular basis. Day care is provided to all residents who work. The city has also made it possible for the residents to receive scholarships for those persons who wish to attend Macon College. Much has been and is being done to offer assistance to those who choose to better their financial condition, yet much needs to be done to end the cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement that led to their condition.³¹

A census report done in 1994 by the city of Macon reported that 45% of all persons and 48.4% of all families living in tract 106 are classified as being in poverty. The 1990 census reported household by household income in tract

³⁰Information was obtained by person to person interviews with the resident manager of the Oglethorpe Homes. For security purposes a layout of who lives where could not be supplied.

³¹Information was also made possible from person to person interview.

106: 410 earned less than \$5000 per year; 262 earned between \$5,000 and 9,999 per year; eight-one earned between \$10,000 and 12,499; thirty-nine earned between \$12, 500 and 14,999; twenty-nine earned between \$15,000 and 17,499; twenty-six earned between \$17,500 and 19,999; thirty-nine earned between \$20,000 and 22,499; and four earned between \$22,500 and 24,999 per year. The Median household income for tract 106 in 1990 according to this report was \$7,375 per year. These figures show that the majority of the households in tract 106 are legally impoverished. Consequently this is a constant reminder to the Mount Olive Church that there is much work to be done for the advancement of the African American people who live in the area where Mount Olive worships.³²

THE MOUNT OLIVE BAPTIST CHURCH

The History

On November 13, 1994 the Mount Olive Baptist Church celebrated its 124th church anniversary. In 1870 Rev. Warren White and Rev. Willingham met from house to house preaching and teaching the gospel to a group of believers. This Christian group later became known as the members of

³²Georgia: Macon-Bibb County Planning And Zoning Commission, (1992), 6.

the Second Street Baptist Church with Rev. Jeems as the first Pastor. Somewhat later, Rev. Eli Smith was called to serve as pastor. During Rev. Smith's administration, the Second Street Church site was purchased, but it was later destroyed by fire.

In 1887, due to some controversy, the Second Street Baptist Church split into three churches: Mount Olive Baptist, Friendship Baptist, and New Zion Baptist (Little Rock). The Reverend John Davis of Alabama was called as the first pastor of Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church.

In the summer of 1888 the members of the Mount Olive Church marched from Union Hall to their new and present church site at 957 Oglethorpe Street. After the death of Rev. Davis, Rev. Car served as interim pastor for nearly one year. For the years of 1889 to 1895 the historical records of Mount Olive are lost.

In 1895 the history resumes and records that Rev. J. B. Borders was called as pastor. Under Rev. Border's administration the church installed gas lights and a baptismal pool. (Earlier baptisms were done in the Ocmulgee River).

In 1909 Rev. J. H. Evans was called to pastor. Under the leadership of Rev. J. H. Evans the church was completely renovated in 1912 and various church auxiliaries were organized. Rev. Evans also was very active in the state and local Baptist convention and association activities. He served as president of the state convention for six years and as president of the state congress for four years. Rev. Evans also served as moderator of the local association for a number of years. Rev. Evans brought prestige to the Mount Olive family, and served as a faithful pastor until his death in 1938.

After the death of Rev. J. H. Evans, the church called the Reverend E. S. Evans (no relation to J. H. Evans) on July 2, 1939 to be pastor. Rev. E. S. Evans had served as the assistant to J. H. Evans for a little more than two years, and followed J. H. Evans as pastor of Mount Olive until his retirement in February 2, 1992. (The Reverend E. S. Evans' accomplishments as pastor of Mount Olive are numerous; therefore, the next section of this report will be devoted entirely to his administration.) After the retirement of the Reverend E. S. Evans in September of 1992, the church called the Reverend Gregory Maurice Fuller as

pastor.³³

The Mount Olive Baptist Church building has gone through many changes. In 1942 the church sanctuary was remodeled and in 1946 the entire building was renovated and rededicated. In 1972 the membership and sanctuary received the honor of being chosen as the setting for filming the movie **KING**, a movie about the struggles of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Reverend E. S. Evans and several other Mount Olive Church members appeared in the film.

The Mount Olive Baptist Church is rich in history and heritage. There still remain today many members who remember the leadership and days of the Reverend J. H. Evans. The church has gone through many trying times and historical moments, served by only a few leaders as pastors. Rev. J. H. Evans served for twenty-nine years, and the Reverend E. S. Evans served for fifty-three years. The roots of the Mount Olive Church lie in the post Civil War reconstruction period. The former leaders led the church as the Spirit of God led them, in the context of the time in which they lived and served. It is necessary to understand

³³Church history was supplied from information secured in church files, and the memories of eye witnesses.

the times in which they served in order to understand the method of their leadership. Each leader added something great and necessary to the structure and preservation of the Mount Olive Baptist Church's survival.

The Administration of the Reverend Ellis Silvanus Evans

The administration of the Reverend E. S. Evans can best be characterized as a lifetime of dedicated service and struggle. Along with being the pastor of Mount Olive Baptist Church for fifty-three years, Lizzie Chapel Baptist of Macon, Georgia forty years, and Macedonia Baptist of Macon, Georgia for twenty years, all at the same time, Reverend Evans is also one of the unspoken heroes of the Civil Rights movement. Rev. Evans served a total of seven churches in his pastoral career.

During the Civil Rights movement there were many persons leading struggles in various parts of the country against segregation and racism. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was leading in Montgomery, and the Reverend E.S. Evans was leading in Macon. After the success of the Montgomery bus boycott, many of the pastors in Macon united in 1963 and chose Reverend E. S. Evans to lead what they organized as the "Bibb County Coordinating Committee" for

the purpose of initiating a bus boycott in Macon, to end segregated seating on the buses. Rev. Evans, along with other preachers and African American leaders, united the Black population in Macon in refusing to ride the buses. Rev. Evans, along with some others, were carted off to jail singing "We Shall Overcome" and "I'm So Glad, Trouble Don't Last Always." Their labors were not in vain. Eight weeks after the boycott began, the transit committee conceded and called for an end to segregated seating on all public transportation.

Along with leading the city in the bus boycott, Rev. Evans also served as a great ecclesiastical leader. He served as the moderator of the Middle Georgia Orthodox Baptist Association for twenty-nine years, and president of the Sixth District of the General Missionary Baptist Convention of Georgia for thirty-five years. Reverend Evans served as president of the Evangelical Ministers Alliance of Macon for four years and president of the Baptist Ministers Alliance of Macon for four years.³⁴

³⁴Information the concerning Reverend E. S. Evans as Pastor Emeritus of Mount Olive, and a Civil Rights leader was obtained from personal interviews with Reverend Evans and others who witnessed his work and ministry in the city of Macon.

It is necessary to list the accomplishments of Reverend Evans in this contextual analysis because the legacy of his work and achievements still can be seen and felt. Both the spirit and the bodily presence of Reverend Evans are with us today, encouraging us to remain true to the mission of the church.

Local Church Demography

The Mount Olive church membership is made up of three hundred fifty persons whose names appear on the church roll. There are approximately two hundred persons who attend Sunday morning worship on a regular basis. The majority of the working membership are employed in service related jobs, predominantly in education, and in jobs related to the medical profession. The age demography is broken down as follows:

0-18 years of age =21%	19-40 years of age =48%
41-65 years of age=20%	66 years old plus =11%

NOTE: These figures reflect a relatively new congregation. This change has occurred since this writer has begun to serve as pastor in December of 1992. When the writer arrived as pastor, the Sunday morning attendance was only approximately eighty five persons. The age make-up was as follows:

0-18 years of age =7%

19-40 years of age =12%

41-65 years of age=26%

66 years old plus =35%

A survey done for the purpose of this contextual analysis showed that 84% of the membership of Mount Olive are female members. Of the 16% male membership only 6% are over the age of twenty-five.

The educational make up of Mount Olive is as follows:

High School Diploma -45%

College Degree - 20%

Graduate Degree - 13%

Mount Olive presently has a large percentage of students from Mercer University who attend services. Therefore, although there is a relatively large percentage of members who have only a high school diploma, many of these members are presently working toward a college degree.

The Mission Of Mount Olive

Until September of 1994, the Mount Olive Baptist Church had no transcribed mission objectives. The congregation viewed itself as a band of baptized believers who welcomed

those who wished to join them in worship and fellowship. As of September 1994, mission objectives were formulated that are stated as follows:

To be a dynamic spiritual organism empowered by the Holy Spirit to share Christ with as many as possible in our church, community, and throughout the world.

To be a worshiping fellowship, experiencing an awareness of God, recognizing his person, and responding in obedience to his leadership.

To experience an increasing meaningful fellowship with God and fellow believers.

To be a church which ministers unselfishly to persons in the community and the world in Jesus' name.

To be an advocate for those in our society who are the poor, downtrodden, oppressed and dispossessed.

To be a church whose purpose is to be Christlike in our daily living by emphasizing total commitment of life, personality and possessions to the lordship of Christ.³⁵

CONCLUSION

In the community in which the Mount Olive Baptist Church exists there is a great deal of ministry that needs to be done. Mount Olive has existed in the past as a separate, alienated group of people who come into the community to worship, and leave when worship was completed. Sadly, the separation that exists between the congregants and geographic community also exists within the congregation

³⁵Mount Olive Baptist Church Constitution, (1994), 2.

itself. Members have learned to be separated and unconcerned about those around them.

There is a great deal of ministry that needs to be done within the church family itself. The mission objectives were drafted to keep the church focused on the goal of the church, which is the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. This is the goal and the aim of this ministry project, and the Mount Olive Baptist Church.

CHAPTER FIVE

A PASTORAL THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

The African American church, traditionally, has been a primary medium of transmitting the Christian faith, fostering communal spirit and creating social change in the African American community. The African American church, in the past, has been the voice of the oppressed and dispossessed, the agent of moral and social instruction, and the meeting place to protest social injustice. As C. Eric Lincoln points out in the foreword of one of Gayraud Wilmore's work, Black Religion And Black Radicalism,

 Their [black] religion was the organizing principle around which their life was structured. Their church was their school, their forum, their political arena, their social club, their art gallery, their conservatory of music. It was lyceum and gymnasium as well as sanctum sanctorum. Their religion was the peculiar sustaining force that gave them the strength to endure when endurance gave no promise, and the courage to be creative in the face of their own dehumanization.³⁶

³⁶Gayraud S. Wilmore, Black Religion And Black Radicalism, 2cd. ed.. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983),

For the African American people their religion and religious practices were the center point of communal relations.

The church has always been, and continues to be, a very prominent part of the lives of many African American people. Yet today, we are witnessing the destruction of our local communities, homes, and the African American people due to violence, self-hate, immorality, self-gratification, and social concerns that divide us as a people. Olin P. Moyd supports this idea when he states that,

it seems that the church, through its preaching and practical theology, has lost some of its ability to shape the guiding principles, moral values, respect for righteousness, and sense of sacredness among the non-churched. Children are being brought up in families without a male presence and where mother and grandmothers are themselves non-churched. There is no one to transmit religious values to these children.³⁷

Today, amid various social crises in the African American community, such as AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), discrimination, classism, sexism, and poverty, many African Americans are looking to the church for answers and support. Some persons who are suffering from societal

vii.

³⁷Olin P. Moyd, The Sacred Art: Preaching And Theology In The African American Tradition, (Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1995), 4.

problems may find a refuge in the church while others may find the church to be non-sympathetic and unconcerned about the suffering of many African American people.

This foundation paper is an attempt at dealing with the social, moral, and religious problems of the African American community by answering, theologically, the questions: How does the church teach individuals personal self-esteem and self-worth? What theology motivates and mandates that a congregation become a community of care and compassion? How so we, in the words of Cone and Wilmore, "Invent new ways in which we relate to the other, to the one who is different, . . . in which the other is not someone to be feared and marginalized, but rather embraced as someone who helps us to be more fully who we are?"³⁸ And amid a society that puts emphasis on individuality and hedonistic behavior, how, and what does the church teach persons to instill community spirit and Christian moral values?

The writer proposes that there are five theological presuppositions that may be used by the church to instill personal self-esteem, create a community of care and

³⁸James Cone & Gayraud Wilmore, Black Theology: A Documentary History, vol. 2, (New York: Orbis Books 1993), 157.

compassion, develop communal spirit, and teach Christian morality. They are: GOD AS CREATOR; THE MINISTRY OF JESUS THE CHRIST; INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY; THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND COMMUNITY; AND A THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY. These five formulate the theological foundation by which the writer's ministry at the Mount Olive Baptist Church will seek to develop community and communal spirit, and cultivate an understanding that each person who is a Christian is called to be an advocate and a caregiver to those who are suffering and downtrodden.

GOD AS CREATOR

Key to the building of community and personal self-esteem is the understanding that creation and the creative order are the result of an intentional effort of a Divine Being that we call God. This God is the Being that at some time in creative history brought order out of chaos and continues to sustain creation. God "is personally involved in His creation, so that it [creation] is not outside of Him or His reach. God is simultaneously transcendent and immanent" ³⁹ Therefore, God is not simply present in creation, but also holds creation together and directs

³⁹John S. Mbiti, African Religions And Philosophy, 2nd ed.. (Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books, 1989), 29.

creation history.

It is vital that persons know and understand that it is God who is responsible for human existence and human life. In Genesis 2:7, of the creation narrative "then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being," (New Revised Standard Version), persons may find a sense of empowerment. First, in understanding that God is the creator who forms humanity from the "dust" of the ground, we come to realize that human existence is the result of divine intention. Humanity was not the result of some cosmic mistake or random occurrence. Rather, God made a special effort and took special care in the development of humanity. Second, Genesis 2:7 informs us that not only did God make a special effort in the formation of humanity, but God also put a part of God's self into God's special creation. God "breathed into his [humanity's] nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." When God, the creator, breathed into Adam's nostrils, bringing to life a lifeless shell, God passed some of God's self into humanity. Thus, humanity becomes a participant and partner with God in God's plan for the destiny of creation.

Theologically, it is necessary to understand these two

points of Genesis 2:7 because first, if one views one's self as the result of divine intention, created and developed with special care by the hand of God, it should leave one with a sense of purpose and self-esteem. Secondly, Genesis 2:7 teaches that each individual is created in the image of the Creator, therefore each person possesses some of the attributes, personality, and being of God. The "breath" of God empowers the individual to become a "creator" of his or her own future as well as in society. In understanding these theological points, not only can the individual see God as creator and provider, but the individual can also view himself or herself in the creation drama as partners with the Divine and unique in creation.

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS THE CHRIST

Understanding the immanence and the activity of God in directing the affairs of humanity is key to understanding the life and ministry of Jesus. The New Testament testifies to the fact that the "Word," which was in the beginning with God and is God, has become flesh in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:3). Jesus is the incarnation of God. He, the historical Jesus, was God in the flesh, the visible manifestation of God. Matthew 1:22-23 refers to the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 which stresses to the

reader that Jesus is "Emmanuel," God with us. God, in the life of Jesus, shows God's love and concern for humanity. "In him God's Word has been 'heard,' 'seen,' and 'touched' with human hands. As the Son of God, Jesus not only 'reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature' (Heb. 1:3), but has definitely, once for all, made God contextual."⁴⁰

Paul, in Second Corinthians, shows the extent of God's love for humanity by stressing that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 4:17). In the Life of Jesus, God identifies with those who are the oppressed and dispossessed of society by suffering the same adversities and alienation of the oppressed. He was born to poor parents, reared in humble surroundings, associated with and ministered to those who were the outcast of society and died the humiliating death of a Roman crucifixion, a death designed for Roman criminals. Orlando Costas supports this idea by stating that

He [Jesus] so identified himself with the poor and the oppressed that he dedicated himself to a suffering service in their behalf. It is this poor, humble, enigmatic, lonely Jewish preacher who fearlessly defended the cause of the hurt of his society whom the Christian faith confesses as

⁴⁰Orlando E. Costas, Christ Outside The Gate, (New York: ORBIS BOOKS, 1982), 5.

the Son of God.⁴¹

Although Jesus, the man, is tried, convicted, and executed by the Roman authorities, it is in His resurrection that the Christian faith recognizes Him to be the incarnation of God. His resurrection gives hope to the poor and oppressed that there is a living Savior who identifies with their suffering and oppression. This savior, the resurrected Jesus, is the advocate to those who would believe in Him and treat others justly. As Orlando Costas observes, "he [Jesus] calls the poor the heirs of the kingdom (Lk 1:51ff) He does not rule as a despot or an oppressor, but as a liberating servant. He says, 'I am among you as one who serves' (Lk 22:27).⁴² Thus Jesus is the conquering Lord who rewards and punishes the just and the unjust. The life and ministry of Jesus is the essence of the Christian faith. His life and concern for the oppressed and downtrodden is a testimony of God's love for humanity and the example by which we strive to live our lives.

⁴¹Ibid., 6.

⁴²Ibid., 8.

INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY

The incarnation of God in the life of Jesus the Christ, identifies God in the suffering and struggles of the poor and the oppressed. But the incarnation of Christ has two other implications as well. First, because God has taken upon God's self "the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7), in the person of Jesus, those who were the oppressors of Jesus, also were the oppressors of God. God now has become incarnate in the very lives of all humanity, regardless of the social, economic, or political standing. Costas supports this argument by stating, "Wherever there is oppression, there is the Spirit of Christ incarnate in the experience of the oppressed: there is God contextualized in the present history of the nonpersons of society."⁴³ Costas further points out that because Christ has identified with the hurting of society, he has become one with them.⁴⁴ This is not to suggest that the incarnation of Christ takes place within the lives of those who may be socially, politically, and/or economically oppressed only. As this writer shall discuss further, in whomever the Spirit of God dwells, Christ becomes incarnate in that individual, regardless whether he or she be rich or

⁴³Ibid., 13.

⁴⁴Ibid., 13.

poor, socially accepted or unaccepted. The evidence of the incarnation is not in where individuals live, what they have, or even where they worship. The incarnation of the Spirit of God is made evident if the actions of individuals model the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ.

Matthew quotes Jesus in stressing that he is incarnate in the lives of the needy (Matt. 25:31-46 NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION):

When the Son of Man comes into his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at the right hand and the goats at the left. The king will say to those at His right hand, 'Come ye that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. . . . And the King will answer them, 'truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, . . . you have done it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. . . . Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

This pericope of scripture, spoken by Jesus, declares that God is incarnate in the lives of the poor and the needy. Those who are faithful in ministering to the needy will be rewarded for their service. On the other hand, those who fail to serve and care for those who are oppressed and destitute will suffer eternal damnation for their lack of service. Therefore, it is imperative that we recognize and care for the poor and the oppressed, for in doing so we minister to God incarnate. The warning Jesus gives is clear: "just as you did it [or did not do it] to one of the least of these,. . . you have done [or did not do] it to me." With this statement Jesus explains he is incarnate in the lives of all persons, those who are able to minister to others, as well as those who are in need of being ministered to.

The second implication of the incarnation is directly related to the first. The incarnation of God becomes manifest in the lives of those who have given themselves over to the attributes of Christ. God becomes incarnate in those persons who allow the Spirit of God to empower and direct their lives to render service to others. The incarnation drives God's people to do as Jesus did, "to go themselves into the world's end and to other frontiers of need and despair, for the love of Him who did not count His

life dear to Himself."⁴⁵ God, therefore, is manifest and incarnate in the attributes of love, freedom, justice, and peace which aim at the transformation of society.

To incarnate Christ in our world is to manifest the transforming presence of God's kingdom among the victims of sin and evil. It is to make possible a process of transformation from personal sin and corporate evil to personal and collective freedom, justice, and well being.⁴⁶⁴⁷

When the attributes of Christ, such as love, mercy, and justice, are manifest in the lives of persons who submit to God's Spirit, society also will witness a transformation that will bring about the kingdom of God and renewal of communal spirit.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND COMMUNITY

The kingdom of God is defined as God's government. It is the will of God being done on earth as it is in heaven. God's kingdom is wherever God is allowed to rule. For this reason, Jesus teaches that the kingdom is not of geographic locale; rather the kingdom of God is "within" any individual who allows God's Spirit to have supreme authority in his or her life. Thus, when God's Spirit becomes incarnate in the

⁴⁵George Carey, God Incarnate: The Contemporary Challenges To A Classic Christian Doctrine, (Illinois: Intervarsity press 1978), 66.

⁴⁶Costas, Christ Outside The Gate, 16.

individual, God becomes the governing force of that life, and the attributes of God, love, mercy, and justice, become the transforming agents for social change.

The effort to bring about the kingdom of God on earth for the purpose of social transformation, requires that our religion not be merely an individual endeavor for personal salvation alone. Rather, if social change is to take place, it will take a communal effort of individuals struggling with the harsh realities of this present age.

For many persons who claim Christianity as their religion, individuality is stressed over community, this is Intra personal salvation. Intra personal salvation is personal, individualistic salvation. Understand that this writer is not suggesting that persons not be concerned with their own personal salvation. Each individual must seek God for himself or herself and "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling." Yet, the building of the kingdom of God and social transformation of the individual can only take place within the context of community; this is Inter-personal salvation because it stresses the relatedness of all persons to each other. Each person comes to realize and accept his or her salvation through his or her relationship(s) with others who are part of the fellowship

of faith.

It must be understood that the individual comes to realize his or her own salvation through Jesus the Christ from the members of the saved community. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out, "God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother [or sister], in the mouth of man [or woman]."⁴⁷ Each individual becomes aware of and accepts his or her own personal salvation out of the context of community. It is the religious community that interprets the Gospel, shares the Gospel, and it is the community that welcomes the person to become a part of the community of faith. The problem that has arisen in the modern day community of many African American churches, specifically the Mount Olive Baptist Church, is that the church has limited its concern for others to only acceptance of the Christian faith. Social issues such as oppression, poverty, powerlessness, violence, and discrimination are not being addressed, unless they directly affect individuals of that local congregation. Yet, the incarnation of the Spirit of God, and the call to build the kingdom of God mandates that the community of faith be concerned with oppression and powerlessness

⁴⁷Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 23.

wherever it exists, thus, working to bring about Infra structural salvation. Infra structural salvation is the transformation of societal structures that are or that may become oppressive so that these structures also might usher in the Kingdom Of God. Through Interpersonal salvation individuals are saved, in turn these individuals who are related intra personally work to bring about the Kingdom Of God by transforming infrastructures. Through intra personal salvation society at large, and religious institutions will be changed and true community will be established.

Because the Mount Olive Baptist Church is an African American church, and has come out of the African tradition, the writer's concept of community also comes from an African perspective. The purpose of community in the African context is to empower the individual as well as the community, develop individual self-esteem, care for those who are in need, and educate members as to the customs and traditions of the community at large.⁴⁸ John S. Mbiti sets forth the importance of the community by making the claim that, to the African, the individual does not exist without community. According to Mbiti, the African concept of community is, "I am, because we are; and since we are,

⁴⁸Mbiti, African Religions And Philosophy, 98-106.

therefore I am."⁴⁹ This philosophy stresses the interrelatedness of each individual to the larger community. It is the community that makes, creates and produces the individual. "Just as God made the first man, as God's man, so now man himself makes the individual who becomes the corporate or social man."⁵⁰ The individual, therefore, views himself or herself as a part of a larger group, but apart from the community, the individual has no means of justifying her or his existence.

Once again, it is this writer's argument that it is through the incarnation of the Spirit of God in the lives of individuals, that the Kingdom of God becomes manifest, creating communal spirit and social transformation. As stated in the previous paragraph, it is through community that individuals are empowered and are given a sense of self worth. It is the community that acts as an advocate for the needy and oppressed, and the community that educates its members concerning issues of morality and tradition.

Forrest E. Harris argues for the importance of the community as a source of empowerment, a transmitter of

⁴⁹Ibid., 106.

⁵⁰Ibid., 106.

traditions, and a creator of individual self worth. Harris states that the "goal of community, . . . is to create a world of 'non-oppression' that supports the liberation of all persons for participation in God's freedom, justice, and love."⁵¹ Accordingly, Harris argues that it is through community that the poor and oppressed find not only an advocate for their struggles, but also are able to see themselves as a necessary part of the community and society as a whole.

"Self-awareness and Self-definition are affirmed in the context of community. The self-understanding of the African American church is grounded in the conviction that God's involvement in the history of the oppressed is to create the beloved community . . . Ministry involves building of community ordered by love and justice in the relationship between persons, God, and the world."⁵²

Once again, it is within the context of community that individuals are able to discover their own identity and self-worth.

Harris further argues that the community serves as a means of empowerment for social change. "Communal power is the capacity both to produce collective consciousness

⁵¹Forrest E. Harris, Ministry For Social Crisis: Theology And Praxis In The Black Church Tradition, (Georgia: Mercer University Press), 43.

⁵²Ibid., 43.

(affect) and to undergo change (effect). Communal power is a force that recognizes the potential for genuine community."⁵³ It is through the collective power of community, that society, as well as the individual, can undergo a transformation that will bring about the kingdom of God. Thus, when the Spirit of God becomes incarnate in the lives of members of the community, the attributes of God--love, justice, and mercy--become transforming agents that empower the community to minister to, and on behalf of, the powerless and oppressed. The Spirit of God, therefore, when incarnate in the individuals who make up the "beloved community," creates social transformation, whereby the kingdom of God and the will of God become manifest on earth, as they are in heaven. To put it simply, God's Spirit dwells within the individuals who make up community, and God empowers the community to care for and minister to one another thereby creating individual and social transformation.

A THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY

This section is based on the works of two theologians who forcefully expound the community concept as a theology

⁵³Ibid., 106.

of ministry. The first, Edward P. Wimberly,⁵⁴ argues that pastoral care in the African American church is done largely through narrative. African American pastors use the art of storytelling as a means of ministering to the needs of their parishioners. Personal stories, the testimonies of others in the Christian community, and biblical stories are all used to minister to the needs of those who may be in or approaching a crisis situation. As Wimberly explains, "Genuine pastoral care from a narrative perspective involves the use of stories by pastors in ways that help persons and families to visualize how and where God is at work in their lives and thereby receive healing and wholeness."⁵⁵

A theology of ministry is one that affirms that caring is ministry exhibited by the entire church community, rather than just the pastor or clergy. The incarnation of God's Spirit within each and every born again believer, and the understanding of the Kingdom and God and community both mandate and empower the members of the church body to become a caring community. As Wimberly states, "caring within the local Black congregation is a response pattern to God's unfolding story in its midst. This unfolding story is one

⁵⁴Edward P. Wimberly, African American Pastoral Care, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 24-28.

⁵⁵Ibid., 9.

of liberation as well as healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling."⁵⁶

C. W. Brister in his book, Pastoral Care In The Church, also argues in favor of the collective community. Brister states, concerning the attitude of the Christians in the early church, that:

Those adopted into God's family had a unique responsibility for one another. They were to carry each other's burdens, and in this way . . . fulfill the law of Christ' (Gal. 6.2), even as each Christian had his or her own work and had to 'carry his (or her) own load' (Gal. 6.5) The spirit of this passage lies in the heart of mutual pastoral care exercised within the family of God.⁵⁷

Brister further adds that pastoral care is the

task of the entire church family, wherein an individual's burden is lifted temporarily or shared continuously by the group. Ideally, the faith community bears the burden until the individual is able to assume full responsibility for life once more. Churches offering ministries of compassion are thus doing God's work on earth. . . . Incarnation means God seeks entry to every facet of human life. [Thus] Christians are concerned about human rights, religious freedom, peace on earth, and due process for all in a just social order. Christian care opposes oppression, advocates moral order, and seeks to incorporate Kingdom of God ideals in the political arena.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Ibid., 24.

⁵⁷C.W. Brister, Pastoral Care In The Church, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Harper 1992), 36.

⁵⁸Ibid., 36.

A theology of ministry as expressed by both Wimberly and Brister is one in which the entire church community participates in the ministering work of God and the pastor to meet the needs of those who are suffering and/or oppressed in society. Incarnation theology, Kingdom of God and community theology help the church to realize the need for the entire community of faith to become a caring community that ministers to each other's needs for the purpose of healing, liberation, and wholeness.

CONCLUSION

This fifth chapter sets forth the theological presuppositions that are deemed necessary for cultivating a community of care and compassion. If communal spirit is to be developed in the Mount Olive Baptist Church, it will take an understanding of each of these attributes: GOD AS CREATOR; THE MINISTRY OF JESUS THE CHRIST; INCARNATION THEOLOGY; THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND COMMUNITY; AND A THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY. By educating the members of the church in each of these theological premises, it is hoped that a community of people who will work to transform the congregation, the geographic community, and the city in which we live and worship will be cultivated.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY:

A MODEL FOR DEVELOPING A CARING CHURCH

As has been stated in the introduction of this work, the social crisis that exists in the context of the Mount Olive Baptist Church is the "crisis of separation." This crisis of separation has brought about a lack of community and communal spirit among the members of Mount Olive. There, in turn, is little trust and support among members, and an overwhelming sense of loneliness and alienation among persons who find themselves in crisis situations.

This separation crisis also affects the way members view ministry. Many of the members see only the called clergy as persons who are responsible for the care and needs of persons who are suffering. Many persons fail to see their responsibility as persons whom God has called and uses as ministers of care and compassion.

The theological foundation on which this work is

grounded mandates that each individual realize his and her responsibility as ministers of care and compassion. Understanding that God is the creator who bestows a part of God's self into humanity for the purpose of being in partnership with the Divine, understanding the ministry of Jesus the Christ, incarnational theology, the Kingdom Of God and Community, and a theology of ministry are all crucial to building a community of care and compassion within the local congregation. It is on these theological presuppositions that this doctoral project and, more importantly, this model of ministry was developed.

To address the problem of the "crisis of separation" that exists in the context of the Mount Olive Baptist Church, this project was prayed over, discussed among six context associates in a number of meetings, and implemented to bring an end to this separation crisis that the Mount Olive Baptist Church is faced with.

The context associates were chosen from the general congregation because of their participation with various ministries of the church. It was my aim to include these persons in the development of this ministry so that they might motivate those whom they are leading to see the need

to be in community with one another and become ministers of care and compassion.

The following is a list of context associates and their various positions in the church: Brother George Espy, Jr., Dean of the Board of Christian Education; Sister Paula Cornelius, Director of Youth Department; Brother Morris Reese, Medical Professionals ministry and a Licensed Physician; Sister Beulah Dumas, Sunday School Representative; Deacon William Holmes, Chairman of Deacon's Ministry; and Sister Eunice Davis, Board of Christian Education Director. Each of these persons contributed greatly to the development and implementation of this ministry project.

Again, the purpose of this doctrinal project was twofold: first, we sought to develop a greater sense of community and communal spirit among the members of the Mount Olive Baptist Church congregation. Secondly, the project attempted to bring about transformation in the hearts and actions of the congregants so that each individual will see himself or herself as a minister of care and compassion.

The pastoral theological foundational paper was shared with each member of the context associates. Much discussion

was made concerning the mandate for developing a community of care and compassion among the congregation. It was unanimously decided that we needed to do something to transform the actions and attitudes of our congregation if we are to live up to our calling as ministers for Christ.

In order to build community and communal spirit, and help persons realize their mission as ministers, the context associates and I met and agreed that one workshop, or event would not be enough. Therefore, this project was done in three phases. For the purpose of this report, I will discuss each phase individually as it was presented as a ministering tool for the Mount Olive Church family, and as it can be used as a model of ministry for other congregations.

PHASE I: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ZAREPHATH MINISTRY SUPPORT GROUP

HOW IT GOT ITS NAME:

I Kings 17 gives the account of Elijah the prophet being fed and nourished by ravens and a brook provided by God during a time when the nation was experiencing a drought. Yet, there came a time when God allowed for the

brook not to yield water and the ravens to stop bringing food to the prophet. At this point the voice of God was heard by the prophet telling him to go to Zarephath where a widow would provide for him.

It is significant to note that God told the prophet to go and be nourished by a widow woman, someone who was socially and economically oppressed, having access to less support than the prophet. Even upon the prophet's arrival in Zarephath, the widow was in the midst of pain and suffering, gathering sticks for a fire that would cook her last bit of food for herself and her child. Yet, through her obedience, she, her child, and the prophet were continually nourished and blessed.

The Zarephath ministry is named such because the persons who are implementing the ministry realize that they also are hurting and suffering. Yet, they lend themselves to the miracle-working power of God and allow themselves to participate in the miracle of healing by being supportive, encouraging, and obedient to the ministering spirit of God.

THE PURPOSE:

We faced the realization that what is needed to develop

an entire community of ministering and compassionate people will involve total spiritual and intellectual transformation of the congregation. At the same time, there are persons in the congregation who are suffering and need help immediately, and can not wait for everyone to "catch the spirit." Therefore, we deemed it feasible and expedient to establish a support group consisting of seven trusted persons from within the congregation who will help those who are hurting, and concurrently, as well as subsequently, lead the other members in transforming their attitudes and behaviors. This intra-personal approach would in turn help transform the local church infra-structure to be viewed as ministers and support personnel also.

SUPPORT GROUP MEMBERS AND MEETINGS:

As I stated in chapter three of this work, I as pastor, thought it to be more beneficial to hand-pick the members of the support group rather than take the suggestion of Howard Stone,⁵⁹ who suggests announcing an invitation to the entire congregation to become members. I selected persons who had already demonstrated a love and compassion for people. These persons also had gifts and talents in various areas that would prove useful in counseling and referral

⁵⁹Howard W. Stone, The Caring Church: A Guide For Lay Pastoral Care, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 24.

situations. Yet, these were also people who struggled with life's difficulties themselves and could both benefit from and assist others who were struggling.

The persons that I selected possessed gifts and talents in these areas: a doctor of medicine; two counselors (one, counselor in one of the local universities; the other a counselor for battered women); a person who worked with one of the church's thriving missionary organizations; and one person who serves as assistant superintendent of the Bibb County Board of Education and whose spirit of compassion overwhelms you when you are in her presence with a unique gift for speaking tenderly and making persons feel better about themselves; and one person who serves in the church as a youth advisor, and who also worked for sometime in a juvenile detention home. These are the persons, along with myself, that make up the Zarephath Ministry Support Group.

As pastor, I met with the group to explain the mission and ministry of the support group. We subsequently, agreed upon a monthly meeting time for sharing congregational concerns and study.

Following Menking's suggestion,⁶⁰ the support group developed a mission statement that would guide us in our effort to be and develop a ministering community. The mission statement is as follows:

The mission of the Zarephath support group ministry is to assist persons who are struggling and suffering from life's hurts and disappointments, by sharing empathetically individuals' struggles, and helping the individuals to grow in their struggle. This ministry will also work to enhance a ministering spirit among the members of the congregation so that all will realize the call to be ministers of God.

In turn, the Zarephath ministry will work with the medical professionals ministry when certain issues call for medical attention; use social service agencies by means of referrals for special needs; and serve as liaisons between individuals and the church family.

The group was required to read Henri Nouwen's book, The Wounded Healer,⁶¹ Edward Wimberly's African American Pastoral Care,⁶² a resource for understanding and doing support group ministry, and On Caring,⁶³ by Milton Mayeroff

⁶⁰Stanley J. Menking, Helping Laity Help Others, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 63.

⁶¹Henri J.M. Nouwen, The Wounded Healer, (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

⁶²Edward P. Wimberly, African American Pastoral Care, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).

⁶³Milton Mayeroff, On Caring, (New York: HarperCollins, 1971).

a handbook that explores the meaning, importance, and attributes of caring.

Beginning with Nouwen's work, The Wounded Healer,⁶⁴ we read and discussed the first chapter of the work entitled, "Ministry In A Dislocated World."⁶⁵ This was one of my required readings while in seminary taking pastoral care and counseling. I admit that I had forgotten how somewhat difficult this resource is to understand, even to the seminary student; the support group faced similar difficulties with this work.

The members of the support group all agreed that in order to really understand what Nouwen was saying, sometimes they had to do two or three readings in order to grasp what he was saying. This became an indication to me that we may need to start at a much slower, or easier pace. The support group was established to try to help persons out of crisis and confusion. The last thing I wanted to do was to cause crisis and confusion within the support group membership. Yet, we did gain from Nouwen's thoughts on "historical

⁶⁴Henry J.M. Nouwen, The Wounded Healer. (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

⁶⁵Ibid., 2.

dislocation."⁶⁶ This discussion was useful because it helped us to understand why so many people are hurting and do not know where to go for assistance. Nouwen makes the point that historical dislocation is, "a break in the sense of connection, which men have long felt with the vital and nourishing symbol of their cultural tradition; symbols revolving around family, idea-systems, religion, and life-cycle in general."⁶⁷ From this statement we discussed how so many people have become dislocated from community, their families, and the church, and how when this dislocation exists and crises arise, persons do not know where to go for help and support in their crises. The conclusion was made that we need to work to rebuild our sense of community so that persons will know that they do not have to suffer alone because they have the support and aid of an entire ministering, caring community.

Because Nouwen's work seemed somewhat difficult, we left The Wounded Healer for a more practical work entitled, On Caring, by Milton Mayeroff. Mayeroff's work proved to be extremely beneficial to the support group members. Each chapter was discussed. I led the discussion on chapters one

⁶⁶Ibid., 8.

⁶⁷Ibid., 8.

to three, and selected members led the discussion on the remaining chapters. The following is an outline and synopsis of the first three chapters that were presented by the pastor. (Please note that though it is presented in outline form, extensive discussion was made on each item listed).

LESSON ONE: CARING AS HELPING THE OTHER GROW

The scripture teaches us that Jesus cared for people. He had compassion for persons who were hurting, he cared both for and about people, and he healed people. Incarnational theology teaches us that we too must care for people. We must have compassion and heal as Jesus did, for we are the physical manifestation of Christ.

Many times healing takes place by just caring. Many people hurt more because they do not have anyone who shows them that they care. Caring and healing are not just laying hands on individuals and "making them whole." Sometimes caring and healing take time--days, weeks, or even years. But in every situation both caring and healing involve helping the other person grow.

I. How do we help persons grow?

- A. By experiencing what we care for
- B. By not trying to dominate or possess the person
- C. By realizing the worth of all persons as all children of God
- D. By realizing the potentials of the individual and
Realizing that we need each other to grow
- E. By not manipulating the other person to give oneself a
False sense of power or raised ego
- F. By being trustworthy of the individual's confidence,
desire for confidentiality, and feelings
- G. By not imposing one's own direction on the other
Person's life, but by allowing the direction of the
other's growth to guide what one does, to help him or
Her determine how to respond and what is relevant to
Such response
- H. By one's devotion to God, commitment to one's own
growth, and the growth of the other

II. Growth depends on both me and the other person:

- A. Learning--What God would have us do in the situation
and learning more about ourselves
- B. Becoming more self determined . . .
- C. Being honest with ourselves and about our conditions

LESSON TWO: MAJOR INGREDIENTS OF CARING

- I. **Knowing**-- We must know the person. Their history, culture, beliefs, strengths and weaknesses, Limitations and needs if we are to minister to them.

We must know how to respond to the needs of the Individual, yet, in order to minister to those needs we must first know our selves.

- II. **Alternative rhythms**-- Being open-minded enough to know that there is no one way to solve some Problems, or no set code or mold that persons can be Placed in that will minister to everyone's needs.

- III. **Patience**-- Allowing persons to grow at their own pace and participating in the growth process without becoming too anxious for the end result.

Patience is also being tolerant of the person's mistakes, without becoming judgmental.

- IV. **Honesty**-- Seeing other persons as they are and not as we want them to be

BEING HONEST ABOUT OUR MOTIVE FOR BEING A
Caregiver. Not doing what we do to inflate our
own egos

V. **Trust**-- Trusting the other person to make decisions
for his or herself after we have pointed out the
options

Also, trusting our own abilities as caregivers

VI. **Humility**-- Involves:

A. Learning from and about the other person,
knowing that they too can teach us something even
in our ministering to their needs

B. Knowing that our caring is not privileged, we
are not above other persons because they have
come to us for help or assistance

C. Overcoming our own personal arrogance to assist
Persons in need; our ministering should not be
So we can make ourselves feel good, but rather
we Feel good about ourselves because we

minister.

D. Learning, through caring, what our limitations are, and realizing that we still have something to offer

VII. **Hope**-- Where there is no possibility of new growth, there is despair. Therefore, we must in Every situation offer and encourage the other to see that as long as God is God, there is hope.

We must also realize that hope involves taking risks that go beyond sometimes the norm of Tradition, safety and security.

VIII. **Courage**-- Much like hope, courage involves sometimes trudging through the unknown and trusting God to both be there in the midst of the situation, and bring the individual out in God's own time and way.

LESSON THREE: SOME ILLUMINATING ASPECTS OF CARING

I. **Self-actualization through caring**-- The author makes the statement, "In caring for the other, in

helping him or her grow, I actualize myself."⁶⁸ Self-actualization is the process of the caregiver developing his or her own abilities and growing while ministering to the needs of the other. Yet, mindful that we grow from care giving we, like the author state, "I do not try to help the other grow in order to actualize myself, but by helping the other grow I do actualize myself."⁶⁹

II. **The primacy of the process--** "The process rather than the product is primary in caring, for it is only in the present that I can attend the other."⁷⁰ We must be mindful not to push so hurriedly to a conclusion or a resolution. How we come to the resolution is where the growth takes place. Our main goal as ministers is to help the person grow in their situation.

III. **The ability to care and the ability to be cared for--**It is not enough to just want to care for someone. We must be able to care for the individual. We must be willing to utilize our resources and abilities to minister to the person's needs. Yet, we must wait until the individual is

⁶⁸IBID., 40.

⁶⁹IBID., 40.

⁷⁰IBID., 41.

ready to be cared for. Example: An alcoholic or a drug addicted person has to want to be cared for before anyone can successfully minister to his or her addiction.

IV. **Guilt in caring**-- Guilt lets us know when something is wrong. Thus, in caring we may feel guilty because of something we could have done and neglected. Guilt in turn, helps us to grow so as not to make the same mistakes over and over again.

V. **Reciprocation**-- The caregiver should never expect reciprocation for their ministering, yet, the caregiver may experience the growth of a lasting friendship to the one whom he or she is ministering to. As ministers of God, called out to care for others, we realize that our rewards come from above.

This ends the series of lessons that I taught in the support group ministry meetings at the Mount Olive Baptist Church. Each month we had a different lesson with a different facilitator so that the members of the ministry can grow in ways that will benefit the congregation and the community.

PHASE II: COMMUNITY, CARE, AND COMPASSION

SERMON SERIES

Dr. Olin P. Moyd, in his book The Sacred Art: Preaching And Theology In The African American Tradition, emphasizes the importance of preaching to the African American people in this way: "Preaching has been the primary vehicle of theology in the African American churches. And, in spite of all the social, political, and economic obstacles challenging the existence and progress of this people, preaching has been the primary vehicle for transmitting transcendent theological truths to the homes and hearts of the masses."⁷¹ Moyd's assessment is true. For many African American people, both in the present and in the past, preaching has served as political forum, pastoral counseling, transmission of theology, a means of calling to attention social concerns, and a means of unifying the masses. Considering these factors, this writer feels that preaching would be a powerful vehicle to use to bring about change of heart and mind in the context of the Mount Olive Baptist Church.

There were a series of sermons preached during the

⁷¹Olin P. Moyd, The Sacred Art: Preaching And Theology In The African American Tradition, (Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1995), 9.

regular Sunday morning worship service with emphasis on the topics: the need for the congregation to be in community with one another; caring for others as a mandate and mission for the believer; and compassion for persons who are suffering. Each sermon focused on "INCARNATION THEOLOGY," the essence of which is that the believer is the physical manifestation of Christ. Therefore, the believer is to show the love of Christ in his or her interaction with other persons.

The purposes of using the sermon series were: 1) To help empower the congregation by preaching and teaching so that they may see themselves as connected with one another, each gaining strength from the other; and 2) To help the believers realize their responsibilities to be ministers of care and compassion to persons who are suffering, oppressed, and depressed.

The following are the sermons in a detailed outline. Each sermon had as its heading and primary focus THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY. (Note: these sermons are in outline form because that is the method I use in my delivery. Persons who may be manuscript preachers may choose to fully write out their messages.)

THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY: IMPLICATIONS OF THE INCARNATION

John 1:1-5,14

READING: PHILIP. 2:1-11

(**THESIS STATEMENT:** The implications of the incarnation is that God gives us [Christians] the same spirit [Holy Spirit] that was in Christ Jesus. That Spirit allowed Jesus to do the ministry that he did, and that Spirit allows us to carry on the ministry that Jesus began.)

The word incarnation is defined as God becoming incarnate or embodied in human flesh for the purpose of bringing about salvation to humanity. Incarnation means that God came down from heaven and took on human flesh and walked, talked, and lived among men. John 1:1&14 informs us about the incarnation, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us." The word becoming flesh is the incarnation. We who are Christians know the word to be Jesus who is the Christ, the savior of the world. Thus, Jesus was God in the flesh. Jesus was God incarnate or God with a human body.

But I want us to understand that the incarnation has another meaning as well. You see, Jesus, before His ascension, told his disciples that he would send the Holy

Spirit who would be in the believer. This Holy Spirit would be the force that would teach, guide, direct, convict, and protect. The Holy Spirit would empower the believer to live and act like their savior, Jesus.

We are Christians, which means we are persons who, first, believe that Jesus was God in the flesh, and because of his sacrifice on Calvary and his resurrection, he is the savior of the world. Secondly, to say we are Christians means that we are persons who strive to live our lives like Jesus our savior. What Jesus did, we try to do. Whatever situation we find ourselves in, we ask ourselves the question, "What would Jesus do?" and then we act. This is what the Holy Spirit is for. The same Holy Spirit that empowered Jesus to do as he did, empowers us to do what Jesus would do. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit is in us, Christians, we become the physical manifestation of Christ. We who are Christians need to realize that we are the incarnation of Christ, because we have the spirit of Christ in us.

What does this mean? What are the implications of the incarnation? How does it affect us as Christians?

Well, It means that whatever Jesus did, we are to do.

It means that we are the hands, eyes, ears, and actions of God. It means that what God empowered Jesus to do, He also empowers us to do. IT MEANS THAT WE MUST ALLOW GOD TO GIVE US HIS SPIRIT SO THAT WE CAN DO WHAT JESUS DID, AND WHAT JESUS WOULD DO IF HE WERE WITH US. And this makes sense because Jesus told his disciples, "he that believes on me, the works that I do he shall do also; and greater works than these shall he do" The same Spirit that God gave Jesus to do his ministry, God gives also to us to carry on the ministry of Jesus.

I. (IMPLICATION): GOD GIVES US A CARING SPIRIT.

A. **JESUS CARED ABOUT PEOPLE.** He cared about the poor, he cared about the down trodden, he cared about the destitute, he cared about the hungry, he cared about the oppressed, he cared about the sick, he cared about the outcast, he cared about the broken hearten,

Jesus cared.

B. **AS THE PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION OF GOD, WE ARE CALLED TO CARE.** We are called to care ABOUT ONE ANOTHER, WE ARE CALLED TO CARE ABOUT THE DESTITUTE, WE ARE CALLED TO CARE ABOUT THE LESS FORTUNATE, . . . ETC.

--The problem with many of us is that we don't care for anybody but ourselves. That is the reason why we can talk about one another the way we do. That is why we can stab one another in the back . . .

WE ARE CALLED TO CARE.

II. (Implication): God gives us a ministering spirit

A. Jesus not only cared for people, He ministered to them. Jesus helped them. He fed the hungry, he healed the sick. He comforted those who mourned. He had compassion, he forgave the guilty, . . . ETC.

B. The incarnation means we have a ministering spirit. It is not enough just to care, we are called to be ministers.

1. Helping people who are in need . . .
2. Forgiving those who mistreat you or make mistakes .
3. Healing is, not just God removing the problem, sometimes healing can be just being with the person who is hurting. . .
4. Using your gifts to help some one else . . .

III. (Implication): God gives us a saving spirit

A. **Jesus saved people.** He saved the disciples on the ship in the storm. He saved the woman caught in adultery. He saved the thief on the cross.

B. **We are called by God to save people.**

Save the sinner. Save the outcast. Save the lonely. Save the drug addict. Save the drug dealer. Save the child molester. Save the molested child. Save the abused wife. Save the wife abuser. Etc.

IV. (Implication): God gives us a suffering spirit.

A. **Jesus had to suffer as the incarnation.**

B. **As the incarnation of God and Christ, you will have to suffer.** Like Jesus you will suffer: Loneliness, Alienation, Rejection, Betrayal, Denial, Doubt, Criticism, People turning away, . . . Crucifixion.

C. **In this new year you may have to suffer . . .** But don't be dismayed, because God will also give you another Spirit.

V. (Implication): God will give you the spirit of victory.

A. **Jesus was resurrected, . . .** At the name of Jesus

every knee shall bow. . . .

B. You will have the victory . . . Over your
circumstances, . . . Trials, . . . Pit Falls, . . .
Mountains, . . . Opposition, . . . Enemies, . . . If when
you give

THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY: LOVING ENOUGH TO CARE

Mark 3:1-6

(**THESIS STATEMENT:** As Christians, persons who are the incarnation of Christ, we are called by God to be ministers of care and compassion. When we refuse to be advocates of and ministers to others' needs, we run the risk of God's withdrawing his presence and power from our lives.)

As Christians, we are people who live with a constant understanding, that we are here today, because God cares.
We were awakened from sleep this morning, because God cares.
We have food to eat, because God cares. We have shelter
over our heads, because God cares. This is not to say that
those persons who don't have the benefits that some of us
have, God does not care, or cares any less for them. But,
we who know "where our help comes from," know that "all of
our help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth," and

help comes to us because God cares.

Not only our material and physical needs, but we
Christians know that we have salvation, because God cares.
 We have forgiveness of sins, because God cares. And we have
 the hope of eternal life, because God cares. All the
 spiritual blessings that are and have been bestowed upon us,
 are ours, because God loves us enough to care.

Because God loves us enough to care, God, through the
incarnate ministry of Jesus Christ, requires that we love
one another enough to care. As Christians, people who
 strive to be like Christ, persons whom the spirit of God
 inhabits, we are called to love our brothers and sisters
 enough to care both for them and about them. We are called
to care for our enemies as well as our friends. We are
called to care for the poor as well as the rich. We are
called to care for the: thief . . . drug addict . . . drug
dealer, . . . deceiver, . . . back stabber, . . . homeless,
. . . liar, . . . oppressed, . . . destitute, . . . sick, .
. . etc. We are all given the responsibility to love enough
to care.

In this scripture, Jesus shows us that we must love
 people enough to care.

I. Jesus enters the synagogue, (the church) and in there is a man with a withered hand. And the people watch Him (Jesus).

-People are watching us today, To see if we will practice what we preach, and love people enough to care . . .
We say we are Christians, but do we love like Jesus loves? Do we care like Jesus cares?

We are being watched.

II. They watched him to see if he would heal the man

A. Some watched him because they knew Jesus had a habit of healing folks We, Christians ought to be in the habit of caring. People ought to anticipate the fact that whenever there is a Christian around, there will always be someone to care. Someone who will be an advocate for the oppressed. Someone who will be a shoulder to lean on. Someone who will minister to the needs of those who have been beaten up, beaten down, and pushed aside by society. People need to know that whenever there is a Christian around, they are in the presence of someone who cares.

B. Some watched him to see if he would break the tradition of the Sabbath.

1. Some people are more concerned about their traditions, than they are about caring for people and edifying people. Many persons whom God has called to be ministers of hope and happiness are sacrificing persons on the altar of tradition.

2. Some traditions inhibit us from caring. We become more concerned with maintaining the tradition for tradition sake than we are about caring for persons needs.

3. Some people watched him to accuse him, because they didn't care.

-Some people do not want you to care because they don't care. They will tell you, "You don't have to do all of that, they'll get by without you." It is not that they think the person will really be ministered to, it is just that they don't care for the person and they don't want you to care. We might as well admit it, there are people in our churches who are like the scribes and pharisees of the text, they really don't care about anything or anybody but themselves.

So they watched him. . . .

III. Jesus told the man to stand in front of the church

"Isn't a man more important than a tradition? Isn't a man more important than your trying to find fault with me? Isn't this what the church is all about: Loving people enough to care for them? Ministering to the needs of the oppressed, downtrodden, broken hearted, and those who are poor in spirit?

IV. What happens when the church refuses to care?

Answer: Jesus got angry with them (God got angry)

A. God still gets angry at the church when we get caught up in all of this other stuff that we deem necessary, but refuse to care for God's people. We sing our songs, . . . pray our prayers, . . . have our conventions, and shout our shouts, but we still don't visit the sick, . . . prisons, . . . help God gets angry.

B. God got angry because the church used this man's problem to accuse Jesus, when the church should have participated in the healing of the man . . .

C. The man was healed, but because the church did not participate, the church did not receive the blessing.

-It is a blessing for the whole family when the church participates in the healing, . . . deliverance, . . .

home coming of a backslidden child. . . . Example: Prodigal son, the father, and the older son.

D. The scripture says Jesus withdrew from them.

When the church refuses to care, it ceases from being a church, and the spirit of God will withdraw. When the choir ceases to care . . ., they will sing in harmony, but have no message in the song. When the deacons, . . . prayers will not be answered. When the preacher refuses to care, . . . Sermon without power or deliverance. When the church refuses to care it becomes just another gathering, because god will withdraw his presence and power.

-Many of us are having troubles at home, because we refuse to care . . . On the job . . ., We are having troubles in our personal lives because we do not care.

V. But when we love enough to care

A. Homes are brought back together again . . . Lives start changing. . . . Deliverance . . . Children start praising,. . . . Drugs stop being sold in the community.

Those who are socially oppressed have an advocate in the church. . . . The hungry are fed, . . . The homeless

receive shelter,

B. The Devil will attack, but God will give you strength. . . .

THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY: THE POWER OF UNITY IN A TIME OF CRISIS AND DESPAIR

ACTS 12:1-11

(**Thesis statement:** When the church is united in purpose, with a plan, and in power, individual and social transformation will take place, ushering in the kingdom of God on earth, as it is in heaven.)

In every period of American History, from its INCEPTION, until the present, we, the people of African decent, have lived through those periods in crisis. From the crises of slavery, the civil war, reconstruction, Jim Crow, the struggle for civil rights, until the present, there has not been a time in American history that we, the African American people, have not been faced with crises. And in every crisis that we have faced, it has been the church that has guided our people through these various crisis situations.

The church and our religion have been the sustaining

force for our people. The church has been a source of encouragement, . . . hope, . . . education, and strength that has helped us make it to where we are today. If things are going to change for us today, it will be our religion, our church, that ushers in this change.

Although we are not struggling for our physical freedom from the oppressiveness of slavery, we have defeated the proponents of Jim Crowism, and we have gained many of the civil rights that our leaders of the fifties and sixties marched for, yet we are still in crises. Jails are filled with African AMERICAN men and women, black women are having a difficult time trying to find a man who is not in jail, on drugs or homosexual. Teenage mothers . . ., disrespect for our elders . . ., poverty . . ., hopelessness . . ., insidious racist tactics, institutional and environmental racism, black on black crime, the crises of a separated people, all let us know that our struggle is not over, and we can not wait for others to end these crises.

We cannot wait for or expect the federal government to solve our problems. Congress wont do it. The president does not have the answer. we can not expect welfare or any other social agency to lead us through our crises. If we are to win the victory over our crises, it will be done by

the power of our God, the strength of a committed people, and the leadership of the unified church. It will take the church, the body of Christ, the unified church, to bring about change and show God's saving power.

The scripture today shows us how the church can lead our people to victory in a time of crisis and despair.

The church was going through a time of crisis. Herod killed James, and imprisoned Peter. Peter and James were pillars in the church, and Herod thought by killing the leaders, you kill the church . . .

A. The church was going through Political Persecution from Herod who found it fashionable to oppress Christians. Much like today, certain politicians use political catch words like ending affirmative action, cutting welfare, and the Christian coalition to rally support and win votes. It has become fashionable to use and enforce oppressive rhetoric to achieve one's political ambitions.

B. The church was struggling with religious persecution from The Jews for breaking the traditions, and

leading people to Jesus. Even in some of our churches today, maintaining traditions takes the place of becoming a caring, ministering community. Many persons in our churches are more concerned with maintaining the status quo, than they are about saving lost souls, ministering to needs and transforming oppressive structures. Even in this post-civil rights period, there are some who still believe that the church should not be involved in addressing political and social oppression. These people went to the church to just sing and shout on Sunday mornings and leave the critique of American politics and policies out of the churches business.

C. The church was in despair because its leaders were being killed and oppressed. The future of the church looked bleak and hopeless. But verse 5 lets us know that the church was united.

The church was united:

I. The church was united in purpose--They realized the crisis that they were in with James killed and Peter facing death, and they all came together. There was little they could do individually, but maybe if they all came together something would happen.

A. In a time of crisis and despair there may be little we can do as individuals, but collectively:

1. Look at the 1963 March on Washington . . .
2. Marching around crack houses in our Neighborhoods. . . .
3. Voting on election day

B. The purpose of the churches gathering was not to socialize

--Fellowship is important . . ., but we have to come together to take time to do ministry. To change attitudes and behaviors. To transform individuals and structures. . . .

C. The purpose was not to complain

1. About whose fault it was that Peter was in Prison. . . .
2. About what the pastor is doing or not doing To strengthen the church.
3. About how much money is taken in or being Spent

D. The purpose was not to find out the latest news or gossip

E. The purpose was to find out what the church could do to end the crisis that they were in.

II. The church was united with a plan--They knew that there was little they could do as individuals, so the plan was to do what they could as a group.

A. I have been in too many meetings where we have talked about what should be done, but there was no plan of action and nothing got done.

1. In your personal life--Goal can be set, you can dream dreams and have aspirations, but if you do not have a plan, all the goals, dreams and aspirations are merely a waste of time. You have to have a plan

2. Young people--Know what you want to do in life. Think about how you want to live, but make sure you plan how you are going to get there. . . .

B. The church had a plan--Let's unite in prayer and call on the Lord . . . There is little that we can do, as individuals, but we can unite together and pray.

1. The church united in prayer--For

individuals. They prayed for Peter while he was in prison.

. . . . They prayed for the crisis the church was faced

with And they prayed for the church

2. Families united in prayer

III. The church was united in power

A. In power because when a church gets together it is different from when any other group gets together:

1. When every other group gets together it is for the purpose of fund raising. But when the church gets together it is to save souls and minister to needs.

2. When every other group gets together it is to socialize, or play games. But when the church gets together, it is to worship and praise the one true God and learn from the ministry of Jesus how to be advocates for those who are oppressed.

3. Every other group was called into existence by man. But the church was called into existence by God.

4. Other groups are motivated by profit margin and the bottom line. But the church's motivation is it love.

5. Other groups are led by a C.E.O. or president. But the church is led by the Holy Spirit.

6. Other groups may only accept certain people based on age, skin color, financial status, gender etc. But the church says "Who-So-Ever-Will let him or her come."

7. Other groups or institutions run the risk of becoming Obsolete or going out of business. But the church will never go out of business or fold because Jesus said, "Upon this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hades will not prevail against it.

B. They were united in power. Look at Peter in prison when the church is united in purpose, with a plan, in power, his shackles were broken, and he was set free.

C. When the church is united in purpose, with a plan, and in power. . .

-Shackles are broken

--Persons who are in

Bondage are set free.

- Lives can be saved --Miracles will take place
- People will be set free --The church will be
- Blessed
- Crisis situations will be resolved
- The crooked made straight
- Rough places smooth --Valleys will be exalted
- Mountains made low

PHASE III: THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Phase three consisted of a workshop I conducted that taught and reinforced, through biblical teaching, the call of the church to be community, and the mission of the church as caring compassionate ministers.

This workshop was entitled THE CHURCH AS THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH, and it took place in three, two-hour sessions. In an effort to instruct the congregation concerning the need for church members to view themselves as community and to develop a ministering spirit, the entire congregation was encouraged to attend and invite guests.

The Purpose Of The Workshop

A. To show the congregation that from the call of Abraham and the genesis of the nation of Israel, to the birth of the church as it was established by Jesus the Christ, God intended for his people to live in community with one another.

B. To show the congregation the importance of living in community for the purpose of addressing social crises faced by African Americans.

C. To instruct the congregation concerning the meaning and implications of an incarnation theology.

D. To instruct and inform the congregation that ministry is the responsibility of every member, not only the called clergy.

The following is the entire workshop as it was presented to the Mount Olive Baptist Church family and guests.

THE CHURCH AS THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH

SESSION ONE: WHAT IS THE CHURCH? (BIBLICAL MODELS)

I. God's Chosen Community (Old Testament)

The relationship between God and Israel was that God called Israel his chosen community. The concept of the chosen community involves three basic ideas. One, the church is of God. Two, the church was chosen for the purpose of praising God and making God's love known. Three, from the beginning the church was a community of persons known as the people of God.

A. The Church Is Of God

The church is not the result of man's decision or planning; it is not just another institution. It is of God. Ex. "Upon this rock I build My . . ." Gen. 12:1-4 God's call of Abram is the historical foundation of the church.

Note: 1) It was God who called Abram, and therefore God initiated the calling of the church into being.

2) Abram's response to God's call led Israel to become God's chosen community.

B. The Purpose And Basis Of God's Choice

The basis or reason for God's choice of bringing the church into existence is found in the verses of Deuteronomy 7:7a "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any other people; for you were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you, and because he (God) would keep his oath to your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen,"

Thus, the church was not called into existence because of anything that was inherent in its members. There were

not good qualities that the people possessed that "made" God call the church into being. The church was "called out" because of God's love. It was through God's grace that the church was founded.

The purpose of God's choice of establishing the church is also akin to God's call of Israel. That purpose is found in Exodus 19:5-6a: "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."

From these verses' one comes to realize that the responsibility of the chosen community is two fold: they were to be obedient and follow the commandments as were given by God; and they were to be priests, persons who led others to, and in the worship of God. Here again, the job of the priest is to make known to individuals the presence and power of God, and show persons of God's love, grace, and judgements.

II. THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

Old Testament theology informs us that God never

intended individual salvation alone. The entire community was blessed, suffered, and received salvation together. We must remember that God brought the nation out of bondage, through the wilderness, and into the promised land together. Salvation was not individualistic. The nation was saved, or condemned together.

The church also must see itself as a community of persons who are blessed, suffer, share, and receive salvation together. This Old Testament theology leads us to the New Testament understanding of "Body of Christ."

III. The Church As The Body Of Christ

The concept of the church as the body of Christ is taken from 1 Corinthians 12; and Ephesians 4

This section is divided into four headings: 1) Christ is the head; 2) the corporate unity of the church; 3) the church as a continuation of Christ's work; 4) the church as the incarnation of Christ

A) THE CHURCH IS CHRIST'S BODY; THEREFORE CHRIST IS THE HEAD

Jesus the Christ founded, and died for the church, and his resurrected presence and power protects and guides the church. The nature and mission of the church is determined by Christ.

B) THE CORPORATE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

Just as there are different distinct parts of the physical body, so it is with the church as the body of Christ. The separate parts of the body are what keeps the body functioning as it should. Note that each part is bound to another part. There are separate parts but there is no separation.

This unity of the body of Christ, or the church, allows and demands that there be unity of purpose, direction, and spirit. If the church is to function as it should, and live up to the purpose for which it has been called, each member of the church must realize his or her connection to the other members of the body. Otherwise, the body will experience dismemberment, and where there is dismemberment, there is a lack of unity and function. Thus, each member of the church must realize that he or she is important to and in the body, and without his or her contribution, the body ceases to be what God has called it out to be.

IV. The Church As A Continuation Of Christ's Ministry

Each member of the church must realize that the church is a continuation of the work of Jesus on earth. The body of Christ is the instrument or agent through which the spirit of the living Christ continues to work. Alan Richardson put it like this, "the church is thus the means of Christ's work in the world; it is his hands and feet, his mouth and voice. As in his incarnate life, Christ had to have a body to proclaim his gospel and do his work, so in his resurrected life . . . he still needs a body to be an instrument of his gospel and work in the world."⁷²

Thus, the church has the responsibility to carry on the work that Christ began, by allowing the Spirit of Christ to become incarnate within each member.⁷³

V. The Church As The Incarnation Of Christ

The term incarnation refers to God's becoming incarnate or embodied in human flesh for the purpose of bringing about

⁷²Alan Richardson, An Introduction of The Theology of The New testament, (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 256.

⁷³The inspiration for the outline concerning the church as God' chosen community; the church as the body of Christ; And the church as a continuation of Christ's ministry was derived from a work offered by Alvin J. Lindgren, Foundations For Purposeful Church Administration, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), 39-52.

salvation to human kind. Thus, the Christ who was and is God became incarnate or "made in the likeness of man" (Philippians 2:7) in the human person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was, as we who are Christian call him, God in the flesh. He was God incarnate in a human body. Yet the incarnation has another meaning as well.

As we have noted, the church has the responsibility to carry on the work of Christ on earth. I agree with Alan Richardson's assessment that the church is "his [Christ's] hands and feet, his mouth and voice."⁷⁴ Thus, the church must see itself as the incarnation of the resurrected Christ. The Spirit of Christ or the personality we know as the Holy Spirit must be allowed to possess the members of the body of Christ so that when persons see the members, they see Christ and the members understand that they are the physical embodiment of Christ. As Jesus was quoted as saying, "I and the Father [God] are one," so must every believer be able to testify of his or herself and declare, "I and the Christ are one."

So then, because the church has the responsibility to carry on the work of Christ, it is able to do so by allowing

⁷⁴Ibid., 256.

the spirit of Christ to be manifest within the lives of its members. The spirit of Christ instructs, informs, encourages, guides, guards, and empowers the church to do as Jesus did and as Jesus would do if his physical presence were among us today.

Session Two: The Mission Of The Church

The mission of the church cannot be separated from what the church is called to be. Thus, we must determine what God has called the church to be, in order to know it's mission.

The Church Is Called To Be:

1. God Centered

The church is God's, not man's. Everything that is done in the church must be done to give God the glory and to show God's love to humanity, not for individual glory and honor. The Church must realize its call to please God with everything it does. The sermons, the music, the singing, the services rendered, the teaching, and the programs offered exist to glorify God, and serve humanity. If the church ceases to glorify God and show God's love, everything that is done, in the name of the Christian church, the

singing, the preaching, the programming, etc., are no more than "sounding brass, and tinkling cymbal."

(AS LEADERS OF THE CHURCH WE MUST ASK, "IS WHAT WE ARE DOING GLORIFYING GOD, OR OURSELVES. EX. USHERS/SINGING/FIRST SUNDAY DINNER'S, ETC.)

2. People oriented

Persons are central to God's church. Central because, one, people are the object of God's love, and two, because God uses people to transmit the faith to other persons. Thus, the importance of living an incarnate life is so that we may show others God in our actions. Therefore, each member of the community of faith must realize the importance of each and every person regardless of social, economic, or racial status. Every facet of the church must keep the focus on glorifying God and serving people.

(Where do church programs fit in and how?)

Programs must be kept in perspective

Because the church is people oriented, programs must be viewed in the right perspective. The church must realize that programs exist to serve the people, not the people to serve programs. Programs should not exist merely to

maintain tradition or raise funds for the budget; rather, they should exist to glorify God and benefit and enhance the lives of persons. Therefore, anything that the church is doing or plans must be weighed in the balance of whether or not it glorifies the creator, and if it edifies individuals.

3. A Ministering Community (Matthew 20:20-24)

If the church is to be God centered, that is, it exists because of and to glorify God, and person oriented, meaning, the church is made up with and for the benefit of persons, and because the members individually and collectively are the incarnation of Christ, then each member of the church must realize his or her individual and collective responsibility to be a minister of the gospel and a minister to persons' needs.

The church as a whole must see itself as a ministering community. The members must understand that caring and ministering are the responsibility of every member, rather than just the pastor or clergy person. The incarnation of God's Spirit in every believer, and the understanding of community both mandate and empower the members of the church body to become a care-taking, care-giving fellowship.

Why Minister?

We minister to others in response to what God has done for us. When one really has been saved, saved not just from or in one's sins, but saved from some circumstance, some situation when there was no human way out, then one can realize the need to minister to someone else. As Edward P. Wimberly states, "caring within the local black congregation is a response pattern to God's unfolding story in its midst. This unfolding story is one of liberation as well as healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling." We are to minister to others because God ministers to us.

4. A Witnessing Community

We are called to be witnesses, (Acts 1: 1-11 As a model).

Jesus, the incarnation of God, did not write a record of his words or deeds, but he did tell his disciples to be witnesses. He informs those who are part of the body of Christ to show and tell the world that they have experienced the resurrected Savior for themselves, and that experience is what has and is bringing about a transformation in their lives. Thus, the church is a witnessing community. Witnessing not merely with word, but with their very lives.

We are called to both show and share God's love to the world so that the world will come to know who Jesus is, and choose to make him their Savior.

Session Three: What are the responsibilities Of The Members Of The Community Of Faith?

1. Establishment of a personal relationship with God. You can't lead anyone to Christ if you don't know the way yourself. You have to be "born again," . . . If you haven't had an experience with the Lord . . .

Yet, we must seek a continuous experience with Christ on a daily basis. This requires prayer, fasting, and participation in and with the community of faith.

--Prayer is communication with God. Not just you talking to God, but allowing God to respond and speak to you.

2. Full participation in and with the community of faith

Participation is necessary for both individual and community growth. We are called to strengthen one another and bare one another's burdens. This can only be done if we all share with one another. We are called to share our gifts, talents, finances, experience(s), and love with the

community of faith.

3. Study the scriptures to know how and what God would have us to do as ministers of the Kingdom of God Daily personal and collective study is important.

4. Exemplify and pursue an incarnational lifestyle, so that persons will see Jesus in you.

Philippians 2:1-11 as a model (New International Version)

Outline: V.S. 1-4--Community with God and fellowman

V.S. 5--8--Evidence of the incarnation

a. Servant

b. Humility-Not too high and mighty

c. Obedience

d. Sacrifice

V.S. 9--11--The rewards of ministering

Again, the purpose of the three phases was to help the congregation see the need and biblical basis for the church to be unified and in community with one another. Each phase was also intended to demonstrate how by being in community the congregation may help overcome social problems that exist among the African American people. Each phase

emphasized the need to cultivate a ministering spirit among our people so that each member will realize his or her call and mission to be a ministering agent in the name of God. Extensive time was spent in research, meetings with the context associates, and prayer, to find the best way to implement each phase to achieve our desired result.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RESULTS OF THE MODEL:

PROJECT EVALUATION

This project called for a spiritual and attitudinal change. Therefore, evaluation is sometimes difficult because only God truly knows an individual's heart. Yet, what can be evaluated, at least to some degree, is what persons think about a matter before and after the project is completed. For this purpose it was necessary to design and hand out questionnaires prior to the project or phase implementation, and then after its completion. The purpose of the evaluation was to see if there was any change in persons' thinking and commitment as it relates to the concepts of the church as community and ministry.

The first evaluation form was given to the persons chosen to participate as ministers in the Zarephath support group ministry. The following is a copy of that questionnaire:

THE ZAREPHATH MINISTRY PRE-DEVELOPMENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you think that a support group will be beneficial to the Mount Olive Baptist Church? If yes, how and why is it beneficial?
2. What do you see as the mission of this support group?
3. What do you see as your role as a member of this group?
4. What qualities must every member of this support group possess if the group is to be a ministering body?
5. What is your understanding of the term "Incarnational ministry?"
6. Jesus in his teachings constantly referred to the term, "The Kingdom of God." What is your understanding of the Kingdom of God?
7. What is your understanding of the body of Christ? What does it mean to be part of the body of Christ?
8. What is your definition of a crisis?

9. What is your understanding of community? (Not geographic)
10. What is your definition of ministry?
11. The scripture testifies to the fact that Jesus healed many people in his public ministry. What is your definition of healing today?
12. For a group of this nature, why is confidentiality so important?
13. In your estimation, what would be considered a "Big" crisis and what would be considered a "Little" or "Small" crisis?
14. How can this ministry cultivate an attitude of care and compassion among the church members?
15. Why do you think I named this group the Zarephath ministry?
16. In the words of Ms. Tina Turner, for this support group, "What's Love Got To Do With It?"

At the time this questionnaire was offered, there had been no preaching or teaching concerning some of these concepts; therefore, the support group members were encouraged to do the best they could with the questions. Support group members only knew that I wanted to form a support group in the church that would serve as liaisons between the hurting persons, and the church or agency. Therefore, the question that the support group found difficult to answer or merely did not know the answer(s) to they were permitted to answer, "I DON'T KNOW." No question was allowed to be unanswered. "I DON'T KNOW" served as an honest reply. The questions were phrased in such a way so that information learned could be evaluated after the training session. The desired outcome was to have support group members know and be able to define terms and concepts such as INCARNATIONAL ministry, the Kingdom of God, the Body of Christ, crisis and healing. For this reason a simple "circle your answer" or "yes or no" questionnaire would not have sufficed. What was needed and requested was for each individual to take a week to study the questions and search the scriptures and other resources for a stated, well thought out response.

Out of the six persons who participated in the Zarephath ministry each person struggled with questions

five, six, eleven, and fifteen. These questions dealing with an incarnation theology, the Kingdom of God, the definition of healing and the name Zarephath all caused the group difficulty. These terms were later explained and became part of our normal vocabulary as we studied and found ways to do ministry together. This same evaluation was presented to the group after extensive study, and each person answered each question positively. The questions the group struggled with in the pretest were answered in accordance with what the scriptures stated, and the group learned as a result of our discussions.

Evaluation for the effectiveness of the support group can only be measured by its usefulness to individuals and how the church body utilized that ministry. Since the formation and introduction of the support group to the church, many persons, both in and out of our congregation, have come seeking help and prayer from its members. Because of the efforts of the support group members, we have been able to: a) acquire housing for one family that was in need of shelter; b) aid and console persons who have lost loved ones in death; and c) visit the homes and hospital rooms of persons who have been sick, and with those visitations assisted the families of persons who had ailing family members.

As pastor, this writer knew that many of my parishioners were struggling with a number of different problems. The support group has helped me and the congregation see that such a ministry is long overdue. Yet, there is a side to this ministry that we have found painful. The support group members have agonized over many of the problems that have been heard from people who are hurting. Problems such as spousal abuse that is taking place within the ranks of our own congregation, child molestation and abuse from people that we know and worship with every Sunday, and persons who feel the pains of loneliness even when in the midst of a crowded Sunday morning worship service, all have caused much personal agony to the support group members. As the support group discussed on one occasion, all of these problems tend to stay with the members even after the person who is in need has gone. This leaves each member experiencing, empathetically, the burdens of others while struggling to deal with our own personal battles. Yet, this is the essence of incarnational theology. We have been called to make the love of Christ known and manifest among all of God's people. We have become faced with the realization that in making the love of Christ known we sometimes feel the pain and the burdens of those who are suffering. Still we are reminded, as one of our support group members stated, "What would the hurting

have if they didn't have us."

SERMON SERIES EVALUATION

To evaluate the sermons that were preached, the context associates and I formulated a questionnaire. This form was handed out each Sunday for the evaluation of that Sunday's message. Initially the entire congregation was asked to complete the questionnaire and return it to one of the context associate members, but this proved ineffective after the first Sunday. Many persons either forgot or neglected to return the evaluation forms even after constant reminding. Therefore, the context associates and I selected fifteen people from the congregation who would serve as representatives for the whole.

The fifteen people who were selected to complete the sermon questionnaire represented the demographic make up of the church. Three persons who were of high school age living with their parent(s); two of these persons were in single parent homes. Five people who were selected were between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five. All but one of these persons were employed. The other four worked medium to low income jobs. Only one was a male who was married. Out of the other four people, two of the women

were also married. All but one of these persons grew up attending church. Four persons were chosen between the ages of forty-six and sixty. All but one of these persons were married; the one who was not married was widowed. All these persons were employed and were long time members of the church. The three remaining persons were between the ages of sixty-one and eighty. Only one of these persons was working; the other two were on fixed income. All of these persons were reared attending church on a regular basis.

The sermon questionnaire was completed and returned by each of the afore-mentioned persons immediately after morning worship. After each evaluation form was filled out, there was a brief discussion as to why they answered in such a way. This was done to better understand why persons responded to the questions as they did. The results were then tabulated by the context associates and presented in written form for this report. Knowing that persons feel either a sense of loyalty to or uncomfortable criticizing a sermon in the presence of the pastor, I left the collection, discussion, and tabulation of the surveys in the hands of the context associates. They, in turn, would provide me with a written statement of the survey and discussion-tabulation results.

The following is a sample of the sermon questionnaire with the results. The "RESULTS" line represents how the fifteen people responded to each question.

SERMON SERIES QUESTIONNAIRE

TOPIC OF SERMONS: THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

Answer on a scale of 1 to 5, five being the most favorable answer, one being the least favorable. Circle your answer.

THE FIRST SERMON: THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY: THE IMPLICATIONS
OF THE INCARNATION.

Scripture: John 1:1-5; 14.

Reading: Philippians 2:1-11

Did you learn anything from the sermon? 1 2 3 4 5

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Results:                                     1  2 12
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Was the sermon coherent? 1 2 3 4 5

Results: 1 14

Was the sermon true to both the scripture and the title?

1 2 3 4 5

Results: 2 13

Was the sermon clear to the understanding of both youth and adults?

1 2 3 4 5

Results: 4 4 7

Was the sermon empowering. Did it let you know that you have the ability to do something new? 1 2 3 4 5

Results: 13 2

Was the sermon instructive? 1 2 3 4 5

Results: 3 12

Was the sermon beneficial to the church and its ministry?

1 2 3 4 5

Results: 15

Was the sermon helpful to you personally? 1 2 3 4 5

Results: 14 1

Results of tabulation provided by the context associates:

"The results of this first survey showed that the fifteen persons thought that the sermon was clear and coherent, instructive and empowering, benefiting both the church as a whole and the individual. Yet, all of the

members thought that as well as you tried to explain the meaning of the incarnation, some persons who were either children or not as familiar with Christian terminology, were probably left not understanding the full meaning of the sermon."

THE SECOND SERMON: THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY: LOVING ENOUGH TO CARE

Scripture: Mark 3:1-7

Reading: Mark 3:1-7

Answer on a scale of 1 to 5, five being the most favorable answer, one being the least favorable. Circle your answer.

Did you learn anything from the sermon? 1 2 3 4 5

Results: 15

Was the sermon coherent? 1 2 3 4 5

Results: 2 13

Was the sermon true to both the scripture and the title?

1 2 3 4 5

Results: 15

Was the sermon clear to the understanding of both youth and

adults?

1 2 3 4 5

Results: 3 12

Was the sermon empowering. Did it let you know that you
have the ability to do something new? 1 2 3 4 5

Results: 2 13

Was the sermon instructive? 1 2 3 4 5

Results: 1 14

Was the sermon beneficial to the church and its ministry?

1 2 3 4 5

Results: 15

Was the sermon helpful to you personally? 1 2 3 4 5

Results: 2 13

Results of tabulation provided by context associates:

"All of the persons completing the survey, both in writing and verbally, agreed that this was a very good sermon. All agreed that it was easy to follow and easy for all to understand, including children. The tabulation committee agreed that we have a long way to go when it comes

to showing our love for our fellow man."

SERMON THREE: THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY: THE POWER OF UNITY

IN A TIME OF CRISIS AND DESPAIR

Scripture: Acts 12:12-17

Reading: Acts 12:1-11

Answer on a scale of 1 to 5, five being the most favorable answer, one being the least favorable. Circle your answer.

Did you learn anything from the sermon? 1 2 3 4 5

Results: 1 14

Was the sermon coherent? 1 2 3 4 5

Results: 3 12

Was the sermon true to both the scripture and the title?

1 2 3 4 5

Results: 15

Was the sermon clear to the understanding of both youth and adults?

1 2 3 4 5

Results: 15

Was the sermon empowering. Did it let you know that you
have the ability to do something new? 1 2 3 4 5

RESULTS: 4 11

Was the sermon instructive? 1 2 3 4 5

Results: 2 13

Was the sermon beneficial to the church and its ministry?

1 2 3 4 5

Results: 15

Was the sermon helpful to you personally? 1 2 3 4 5

Results: 2 13

Results of tabulation provided by context associates:

"Everyone who completed the survey thought this was a very good sermon. Everyone said they could see the power of unity in times of difficulty. We asked them if all three sermons helped them to see the importance of unity and caring for one another? Everyone agreed that the sermons showed that we need to be more unified with and loving to one another."

The results of the sermon questionnaires prove that

both Olin Moyd and Kelly Smith's assessment is true; preaching is still one of the most powerful means of transmitting the faith in the African American community. As was stated by Dr. Sherman Tribble, one of the mentors for the United Seminary Doctor of Ministry program, "sometimes preaching is the only pastoral care some people receive."⁷⁷ The sermons that were delivered at the Mount Olive Baptist Church helped the congregation to further see the need for the church to be in community with one another, and the call for each person to be a minister of care and compassion.

CHURCH PRELIMINARY AND FINAL EVALUATION

The final evaluation form was given out to one hundred members of the church body prior to the establishment of the Zarephath support group ministry, the series of sermons or church workshop. The purpose of doing a pretest and a post-test was to evaluate to see if there was a change in the thinking of the hundred persons after the various ministries and sermons were presented. To insure that valid results were obtained, the same one hundred persons who participated in the pretest, also participated in the post-test evaluation.

⁷⁷This statement was made while in one of the peer group meetings held during the Intensive Seminar, January, 1996, United Theological Seminary.

The one hundred persons who participated were all members of the church body. For the pretest, rather than select certain persons from among the congregation, the context associates and I agreed that since we wanted so many persons, we would leave participation open to volunteers. After acquiring the one hundred persons needed, the context associates acquired their names, addresses and phone numbers.

The persons who participated in the pre-and post-test came from a wide variety of backgrounds. Most of them were employed and had at least a high school education. A third of the participants had attended at least one to two years of college or some vocational school. Only twenty persons were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine; all the others were thirty years of age and above. There were no persons under the age of fifteen who participated in this evaluation. Most of the participants grew up in the church most of their lives, yet there were some who joined "The Church," not Mount Olive, but the church universal, after the age of thirty. This was the make-up of those who participated in the church pre-and post-evaluation.

The questionnaires were completed together after regular Sunday morning worship service. The following is a

copy of the questionnaire and a tally of the results.
 Tabulation of both the pre-and post-tests and the final
 conclusion were all done by the context associates, with
 minor help from me.

EVALUATION: THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

Pretest

Please circle your level of agreement with the following
 statements using the code:

AS	A	NO	D	DS
AGREE	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	DISAGREE
STRONGLY				STRONGLY

1) I believe that the ministry of Christ's Church involves
 ministry (service) by both the members of the church and the
 called clergy.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
43%	35%	8%	14%	

2) I agree with the scriptures that each believer in Jesus
 should be an ambassador who makes Christ known to those who
 do not already believe.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
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69%	26%	4%	1%
-----	-----	----	----

3) The First Sunday Fellowship Dinner will help our congregation to become a closer church family.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
84%	12%	3%	1%	

4) Pastor Fuller's sermons have helped to make known God's presence, peace, power, and love.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
81%	18%		1%	

5) I believe that if the church continues in the path that we have started God will continue to bless Mount Olive beyond measure.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
76%	23%	1%		

6) I am grateful that God is adding new members to the Mount Olive Baptist Church family.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
82%	17%	1%		

7) I am looking forward to participating in and with new ministries of the church that serve both members and

nonmembers. (Ministries such as: Just a Sister Away Ministry; Clothing and/or Food Bank; and support group ministry.)

AS	A	NO	D	DS
41%	36%	22%	1%	

8) I believe that God has called me to minister to humanity with the gifts and talents he has given.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
39%	37%	22%	2%	

9) I believe that God ministers to person's needs by working through other persons.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
69%	31%			

10) I believe that as an African American I am connected by history, heritage, and culture to other African Americans.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
63%	34%	2%	1%	

11) I believe that what makes my life worth living is God's love and my relationship with my fellow brothers and sisters.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
----	---	----	---	----

61%	31%	7%	1%
-----	-----	----	----

12) I believe that a church that is not concerned about the welfare of other persons is not carrying on the mission and ministry of Jesus.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
59%	27%	11%	3%	

13) I believe that I must live out the life of Christ in my life so that persons can see Jesus in me.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
79%	17%	2%	2%	

14) I believe that the church would benefit from having a support group that acts a liaison between the congregation and the person.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
51%	33%	16%		

15) I believe that in the present political, economic, and societal situation, if the African American people do not pull together as a family, our future will be disastrous.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
73%	25%	1%	1%	

The following are the results of the survey post test.

EVALUATION: THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

Post test

Please circle your level of agreement with the following statements using the code:

AS	A	NO	D	DS
AGREE	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	DISAGREE
STRONGLY				STRONGLY

1) I believe that the ministry of Christ's Church involves ministry (service) by both the members of the church and the called clergy.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
78%	22%			

2) I agree with the scriptures that each believer in Jesus should be an ambassador who makes Christ known to those who do not already believe.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
77%	21%	1%	1%	

3) The First Sunday Fellowship Dinner has helped our congregation to become a closer church family.

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AS	A	NO	D	DS
42%	31%	18%	8%	1%

4) Pastor Fuller's sermons have helped to make known God's presence, peace, power, and love.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
79%	16%	4%	1%	

5) I believe that if the church continues in the path that we have started, God will continue to bless Mount Olive beyond measure.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
70%	24%	5%	1%	

6) I am grateful that God is adding new members to the Mount Olive Baptist Church family.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
79%	20%	1%		

7) I am looking forward to participating in and with new ministries of the church that serves both members and nonmembers. (Ministries such as: Just A Sister Away Ministry; Clothing and/or Food Bank; And support group ministry.)

AS	A	NO	D	DS
----	---	----	---	----

44%	35%	17%	2%	2%
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8) I believe that God has called me to minister to humanity with the gifts and talents he has given.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
49%	36%	10%	5%	

9) I believe that God ministers to persons needs by working through other persons.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
73%	26%	1%		

10) I believe that as an African American I am connected by history, heritage, and culture.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
69%	27%	3%	1%	

11) I believe that what makes my life worth living is God's love and my relationship with my fellow brothers and sisters.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
80%	20%			

12) I believe that the church that is not concerned about the welfare of other persons is not carrying on the mission

and ministry of Jesus.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
68%	25%	3%	2%	2%

13) I believe that I must live out the life of Christ in my life so that persons can see Jesus in me.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
84%	14%		2%	

14) I believe that the church would benefit from having a support group that acts as a liaison between the congregation and the person.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
50%	31%	18%	1%	

15) I believe that in the present political, economic, and societal situation, if the African American people do not pull together as a family, our future will be disastrous.

AS	A	NO	D	DS
78%	17%	3%	2%	

We realized that questionnaires of this type must be evaluated with the understanding that some individuals tend not to put their honest answer; rather, they think they should respond as they are expected to in a given situation.

Yet, we found this to be the best way to measure whether persons were grasping the concepts of the church as community and ministry.

The results of the study provided by the context associates were as follows:

There appears to be a substantial increase in the growth of the membership as it relates to the mission and ministry of the church and its members. In every question but one, question three, there were more favorable responses given between pretest and post-test. Question three does raise some concern. The first Sunday fellowship dinner was initiated to bring members closer together, but it appears that its mission has failed. More work needs to be done to insure that the goal of the first Sunday fellowship dinner is achieved. Over all, the membership does seem to have grasped and embraced the idea that each individual is a minister.

KNOWLEDGE GAINED FROM THIS STUDY (CONCLUSION)

What this writer set out to learn prior to initiating this project can be addressed in the questions that plagued me as I began to minister as pastor of God's people. I had viewed people in church, Sunday after Sunday, singing, shouting, rejoicing over God's word, but yet, not speaking to one another; unconcerned about each other's problems and struggles. Many persons were formulating ties with some people, while shrugging their shoulders at others, possibly because of the "other's" financial status, physical

appearance, and/or social status. As pastor, I heard the testimonies of persons who were suffering and struggling in silence because they were afraid to let their church family know that they were in pain. I, in turn, was forced to deal with my own pain as a relatively new pastor to the church, while struggling with a wife who had AIDS and not knowing who in the congregation I could trust with that information. The questions that plagued me in ministering under these circumstances were: How does God feel about how we who call ourselves Christians treat one another? What has God established the church for, and what has God called it to be? knowing that, ultimately, salvation is an individual affair, I still pondered: Does God intend for God's people not to be concerned about the conditions and circumstances of others? And can anyone ever receive salvation outside of community? Each of these questions haunted my mind as I struggled to minister to God's church and deal with my own pain at the same time.

What I learned in an attempt to answer these questions was brought out in my theological perspective section of this work. In my research I discovered the answer to my questions. The incarnation of God in the flesh, the life and ministry of the incarnate God, Jesus the Christ, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and an

understanding of what ministry really is, all point to the fact that God is calling humankind to be in community with one another. All of humanity is called to care about oppression and oppressive systems that degrade and discriminate against persons for whatever reason, be it due to gender, race, culture, economic, or sexual. All of God's people are called to be caring, compassionate ministers who make God's love and presence known by allowing the Spirit of God to become incarnate in the lives of the individual. This incarnation of God brings persons into community with one another and empowers the individual to work for the liberation of the oppressed, justice for the poor, and empowerment for the downtrodden. Thus, God has established the church to be an advocate for those who have been pushed down or pushed aside by society. It is only through the church's living in community with one another, and participating with and making itself available to the Spirit of God, that the church is able to do the ministry that God has called the church to do, and be what God has called the church to be.

This writer along with the members of the Mount Olive Baptist Church have benefited greatly from the implementation of this project. Members testify that they can see a change in the attitudes and actions of the

congregation since this work was begun. Many persons now realize their call and mission to be ministers of care and compassion. Also, the church as a whole has taken on various projects that enabled the church to reach out into the community to do ministry.

In my own spiritual journey I can both see and feel a transformation that has taken place within me. I believe that sometimes God will put us in positions where we have to face the truth about ourselves. In the struggle with my wife's sickness, the suffering in silence, and the pain that this situation has caused, I have come to realize my own weakness and strengths. I realize now that I too was not as compassionate toward other peoples situations as I have been called to be. Much like many of the members of Mount Olive, prior to this project, I maintained the attitude that if it did not affect me, it did not matter very much. Now I have come to realize what true incarnational theology and ministry is all about. Now I know the need and necessity to be a minister of care and compassion to persons who are hurting. I am also more mindful that persons who may come to worship in the midst of the congregation, may not tell anyone but the Lord their pain, but they come to hear a word from Almighty God that will bring some relief to their suffering.

My own growth journey and the work of the Mount Olive Baptist Church is not complete. We are allowing God's transformative powers to work both on and within us. Yet, with continued labor, teaching, and preaching, it is evident that God will cultivate, from within the Mount Olive Baptist Church, a community of caring compassionate ministers who will realize the call to minister to others and thereby, transform society.

APPENDIX TABLE

APPENDIX ONE

Map Of Georgia..... 157

APPENDIX TWO

Map Of Church site..... 158

APPENDIX THREE

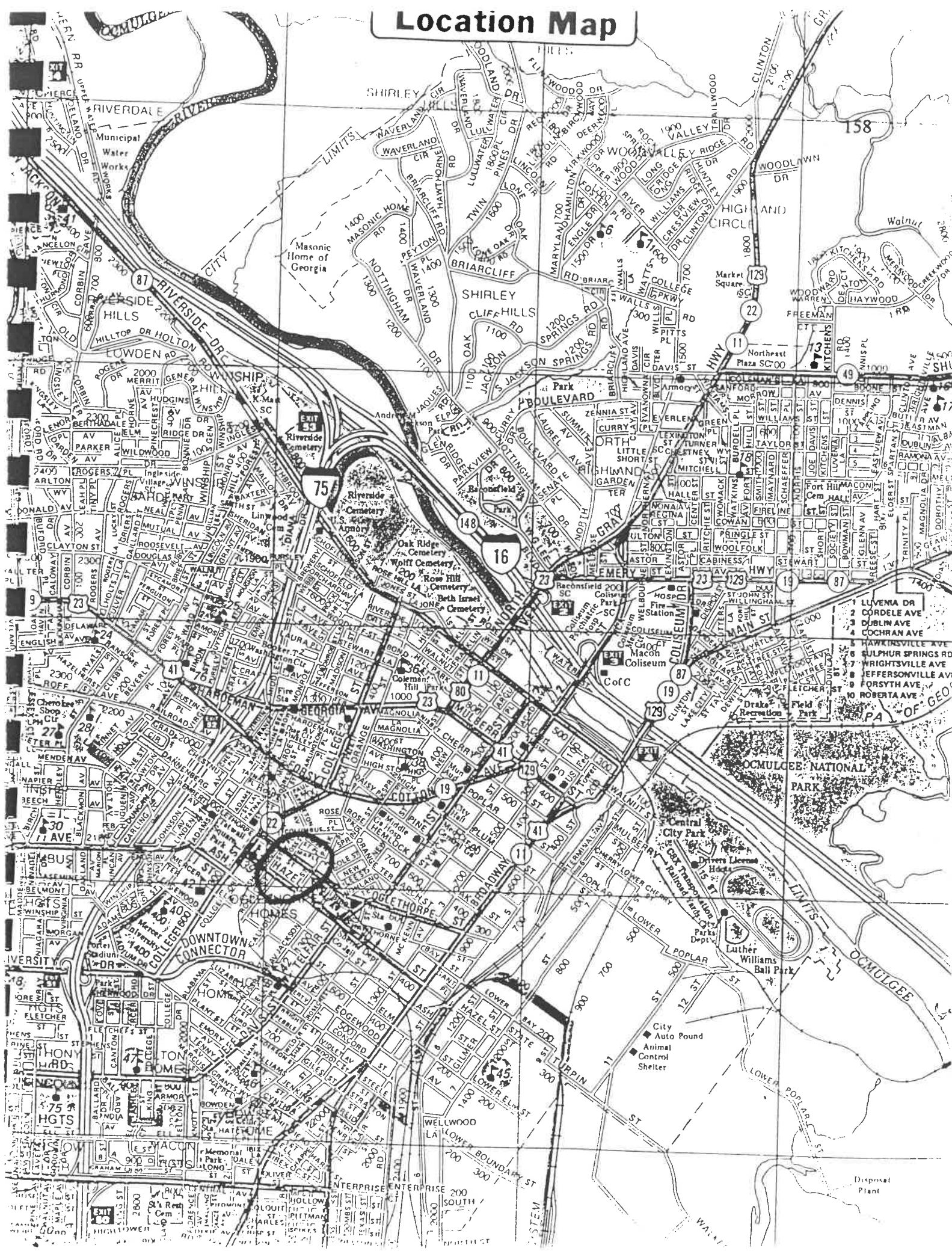
Nineteen Ninty Census Report Profiles..... 159-161

APPENDIX FOUR

Bibb County Employment Graph..... 162



Location Map



1990 CENSUS POPULATION PROFILE

Bibb County, GA

159

Population	149967	Households	56307	Housing Units	61462
Median Age	32.6	Avg HH Size	2.58	Average Value	\$69845
Families	39301	Group Quarters	3.2%	Average Rent	\$ 258

POPULATION BY AGE AND SEX*

	<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>		<u>Total Population</u>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	69827	100.0	80140	100.0	149967	100.0
0-4	5751	8.2	5590	7.0	11341	7.6
5-9	5510	7.9	5433	6.8	10943	7.3
10-14	5495	7.9	5404	6.7	10899	7.3
15-19	5709	8.2	5998	7.5	11707	7.8
20-24	5251	7.5	5975	7.5	11226	7.5
25-29	6080	8.7	6318	7.9	12398	8.3
30-34	5990	8.6	6658	8.3	12648	8.4
35-39	5547	7.9	5996	7.5	11543	7.7
40-44	4993	7.2	5414	6.8	10407	6.9
45-49	3686	5.3	4215	5.3	7901	5.3
50-54	3042	4.4	3598	4.5	6640	4.4
55-59	2977	4.3	3525	4.4	6502	4.3
60-64	2790	4.0	3702	4.6	6492	4.3
65-69	2632	3.8	3693	4.6	6325	4.2
70-74	1946	2.8	3133	3.9	5079	3.4
75-79	1350	1.9	2452	3.1	3802	2.5
80-84	703	1.0	1715	2.1	2418	1.6
85+	375	0.5	1321	1.6	1696	1.1
18+years	49705	71.2	60399	75.4	110104	73.4
21+years	46310	66.3	56438	70.4	102748	68.5
65+years	7006	10.0	12314	15.4	19320	12.9
Median Age	30.9		34.0		32.6	

NOTE: There was a tendency to report age on the date when the census questionnaire was completed rather than on April 1, 1990. For this reason, about 10% of persons in most age groups are probably 1 year younger, according to the Census Bureau.

* These population counts will not be adjusted, according to a Department of Commerce announcement made on July 15, 1991.

Source: CACI Marketing Systems, Arlington, VA

1990 CENSUS POPULATION PROFILE

Bibb County, GA

160

Population	149967	Households	56307	Families	39301
Median Age	32.6	Avg HH Size	2.58	Avg Family Size	3.14
Per Capita Inc	\$12125	Group Quarters	3.2%	Housing Units	61462

HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME*

	Number 56306	Percent 100.0
Total		
<\$15,000	16559	29.4
\$15,000-24,999	10647	18.9
\$25,000-34,999	9051	16.1
\$35,000-49,999	9342	16.6
\$50,000-74,999	7348	13.1
\$75,000-99,999	2064	3.7
\$100,000-124,999	828	1.5
\$125,000-149,999	217	0.4
\$150,000+	250	0.4

FAMILIES BY INCOME*

	Number 39300	Perce 100.0
Total		
<\$15,000	8527	21.7
\$15,000-24,999	6959	17.7
\$25,000-34,999	6863	17.5
\$35,000-49,999	7747	19.7
\$50,000-74,999	6482	16.5
\$75,000-99,999	1745	4.4
\$100,000-124,999	641	1.6
\$125,000-149,999	148	0.4
\$150,000+	188	0.5

Average HH Income
Median HH Income

\$32297
\$26046

Average Family Income
Median Family Income

\$36289
\$31067

POPULATION BY AGE

	Number 149967	Percent 100.0
Total		
0-4	11341	7.6
5-14	21842	14.6
15-19	11707	7.8
20-24	11226	7.5
25-34	25046	16.7
35-44	21950	14.6
45-54	14541	9.7
55-64	12994	8.7
65-74	11404	7.6
75-84	6220	4.1
85+	1696	1.1
18+	110104	73.4

POPULATION BY RACE

	Number 149967	Perce 100.0
Total		
White	86252	57.5
Black	62526	41.7
American Indian	190	0.1
Asian/Pacific	791	0.5
Other Races	208	0.1
Hispanic Origin**	916	0.6
Hispanic By Race**	916	100.0
White	508	55.5
Black	196	21.4
Other	212	23.1

* Income data represent 1990 CACI updates, expressed in current dollars. All other data are from the 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Tape File 1A.

** Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Source: CACI Marketing Systems, Arlington, VA

POPULATION TRENDS

1982 - 1989

<u>Year</u>	<u>City of Macon</u>	<u>Bibb County</u>	<u>Metro Area*</u>
1982	115,600	151,000	270,200
1984	118,900	154,100	276,400
1986	120,700	156,500	282,700
1989	120,300	159,000	294,600

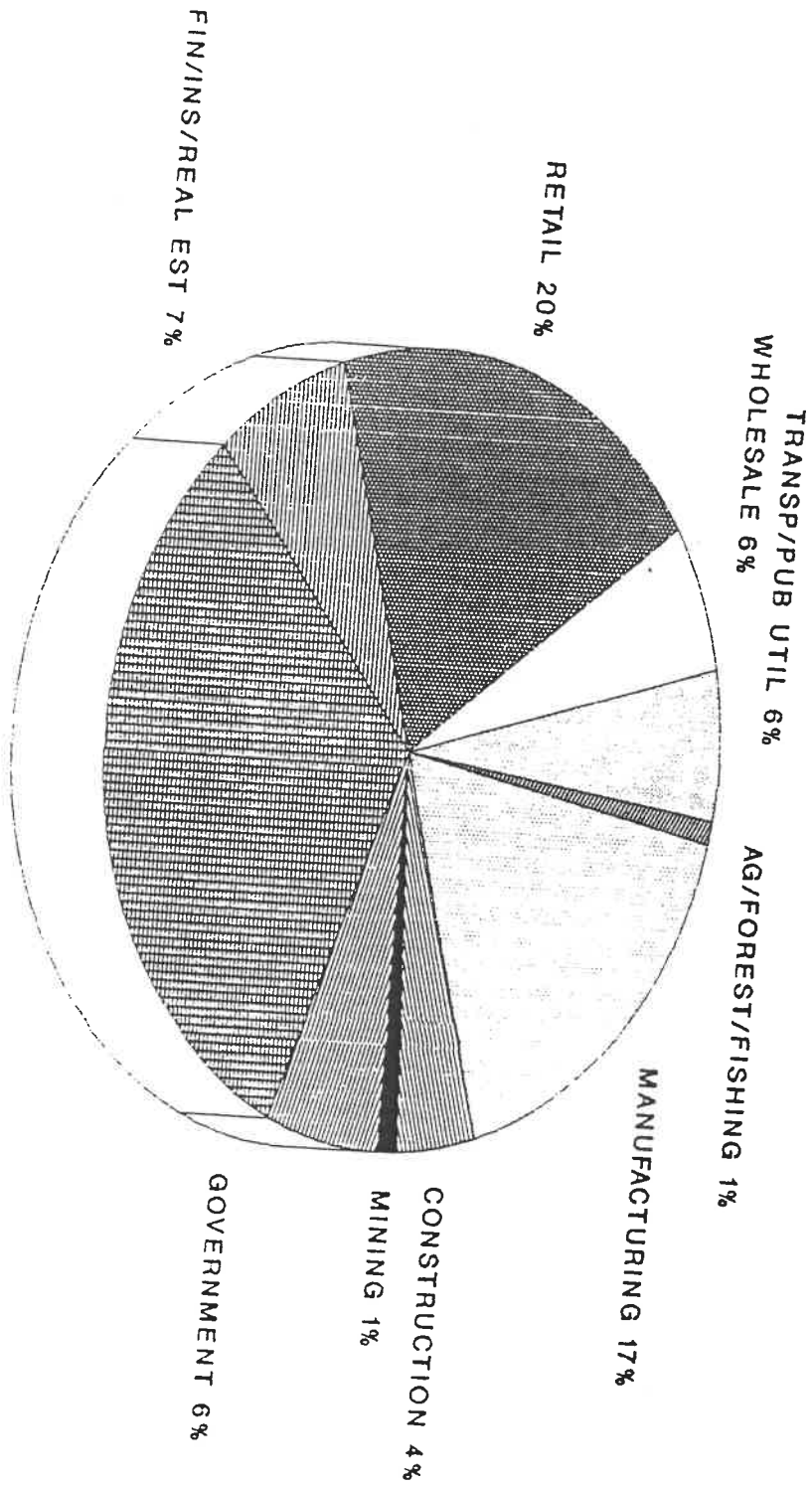
Populations Projections:

	<u>1994</u>	<u>2000</u>
Bibb County	162,300	173,400
Metro Area	309,000	331,640

* Includes Bibb, Houston, Jones and Peach Counties.

Sources: Sales and Marketing Management, 1990 edition

BIBB COUNTY AREA INDUSTRY MIX BY EMPLOYMENT



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